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PRESENT CONTROVERSY ON THE
GOSPEL MIRACLES / BY F.R. MON
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ON THE
GOSPEL MIRACLES

BY

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE problem of miracles is undoubtedly the problem of to-day. During the last two years the question has reached an acute stage in the Church of England. To begin with the Middlesbro' Congress of 1912. There the two protagonists in the recent controversy, Bishop Gore and Professor Sanday, read papers in which their subsequent positions were, to some extent, foreshadowed. The Bishop laid stress upon the fact that the one great obstacle to the reconciliation of contemporary intellect with the faith was miracles. The intellectual motive for the widespread, present-day disbelief in miracle he found in the dominance of a certain philosophical or scientific conception of the world. That conception is, of a closed system of physical sequences not to be invaded by any event the system cannot explain. But even scientific men, as the Bishop pointed out, regard that conception of nature as "an abstraction practically valid for purposes of science, but never intellectually valid if it claims to be complete." He held it to be quite possible for the Christian belief to be perfectly at home with this conception of nature, provided it be not regarded as exclusive or exhaustive. The purport of the address was an appeal to men of science to get over their pre-suppositions, their prejudices against miracle, and to enlarge their views of the order of nature so as to allow room for our Lord's conception of the Father. He asked them, in short, to use Sir Oliver Lodge's distinction, to believe in *Spiritual guidance* \

as well as in *irrefragable law*¹. We may remark that it is far more difficult for any one who believes in the God of the New Testament to regard His power as restrained or exhausted by the order of physical nature than it is for the scientific mind to enlarge its conception of the order of life. The latter is surely more than mechanical or material. It must involve consciousness and thought and will, otherwise it could not be directed, much less known. The scientific axioms which appear to be opposed to miracle are the law of the conservation of energy and the uniformity of natural law. The former of these, as Sir Oliver Lodge has shown, is not contravened by a directing influence such as that of the mind or will which "affects the *quantity* of energy no whit."² Bergson's creative consciousness also controls matter. The latter is a purely mental abstraction, and therefore an impossibility in a world of purely physical energy or movement; while it is called in question by the catastrophes in nature and the complexities of the atom.³

On the other hand, Dr. Sanday in the same discussion seemed to regard the historical evidence for miracle as the weak point. "The whole problem of miracle," he said, "seems to me to reduce itself to this: To find the exact point at which the supernatural ends and the really abnormal begins; to determine in any particular case exactly what amount of allowance has to be made and to reconstruct the narrative as best we can, and as far as we can accordingly." What we are called upon to settle then is this: How much of the record is

¹ *Men and the Universe*, p. 62.

² *Ibid*, p. 66.

³ See Prof. Planck's address as Rector of Berlin University, 1913, translated and quoted by Canon McClure in *Modern Substitutes*, p. 146.

true, and how much is symbolical; how much is due to the faulty observation of the observer, and how much to the fervid imagination of the scribe, and to the Old Testament moulds and types of thought. The problem of miracle is, accordingly, one of evidence. "After the Congress," he says, "the progress of my thought was rapid. I soon realized that it was once more *a question of the balance of evidence*" (p. 24). In his last utterance, in which he replied to Bishop Gore's *Challenge to Criticism*, and in which his tendency to the Modernist position is somewhat—and we hope but temporarily—pronounced, he again insists that it is a matter of evidence. "I was not disposed," he writes, "to put any limit to the Divine power or to ascribe any necessity to natural law as such. I did not for a moment doubt the power of God to make what exceptions He pleased, *I only asked for better evidence of His will to make them*" (p. 22). He then proceeds to remark that there was "a certain amount of ostensible evidence," but, "in the light of historical criticism this evidence seemed little by little to fall to pieces." It was first given up over the whole field of profane history. There is also a strong feeling that it has also given way for the Old Testament. There was abundant evidence for the operation of higher spiritual causes, but when it came to a breach of the physical order, *the evidence was always found to be insufficient* (p. 23). Owing to this insufficiency of evidence for what he terms "a breach of the physical order," he draws a distinction—which has since been challenged by many, Dean Inge and Mr. Lacey particularly, as a return to an obsolete Dualism—between events that are *supra naturam* and those that are *contra naturam*. The latter class, he says, "involve some definite reversal of the natural physical order," while

the former class consists of events "extraordinary, exceptional and testifying to the presence of higher spiritual forces." These latter he admits, for "they involved no real breach in the order of nature," and "were abundantly accounted for by the presence in the world of an unique Personality, and by that wave of new spiritual force which flowed from it in an ever-increasing volume" (p. 24).

With regard to his group of events *contra naturam*, which might more correctly be styled *contra naturam quoad nobis notam*, he says "The conception of such miracles took its rise in the region of the Old Testament" (p. 26), "they came to be attributed to Him in this form by the imagination of the early Church," and in most of these cases *something* happened which gave rise to the story" (p. 19). There remain, accordingly, in this class "only the two great events—the Supernatural beginning and the Supernatural ending of the Lord's earthly career." He remarks that "it would be only *human* (!) if the records that have come down to us presented some exaggerations in detail" (p. 26). He affirms his entire belief in the central reality of the Supernatural birth and the Supernatural Resurrection. His belief in the former, however, is qualified by the statement, "I cannot so easily bring myself to think that His Birth was (as I should regard it) *unnatural*"; and with regard to the latter he asserts that "the Risen Lord as Spirit still governed and inspired His Church," but that the accounts that have come down to us seem to be "too conflicting and confused to prove the actual resuscitation of the dead body of the Lord from the tomb" (p. 20). He concludes by saying, "If it is said that what I have written is Modernism, I would reply that I believe—I emphatically and hopefully believe—that a sound and right Modernism is really

possible; that the Saviour of mankind extends His arms towards the cultivated modern man just as much as He does towards the simple believer."

Whatever we may think of the Professor's attitude to our historic faith, we cannot but regard this attempt to reconcile contemporary intellect with the faith as honest and sincere, although there lies at its basis the grave confusion of an historical religion with a philosophical system. The latter is purely subjective. We have no standard of testing how far it explains or corresponds with the objective world of fact, or how far it expresses the whole truth as God sees it. We can only judge how far we think it does. On the other hand, an historical religion rests upon an objective basis, and must totter when based on facts which are proved by science to be untrue or by criticism to be without evidence. Accordingly, we shall attempt in the following pages to prove (1) that miracles do not conflict necessarily with a rational and complete view of the world—that is, that miracles are not impossible in the abstract; and (2) that there is reliable documentary evidence for them. This will involve to some extent an examination of the positions of Rationalism, Ritschlianism, and Modernism. Both the latter "isms" are phases of Rationalism within the sphere of Christianity. Modernism¹ is certainly a Rationalist movement which began within the pale of the Roman Church in France just ten years ago, with the publication of M. Loisy's work *L'Évangile et l'Église*. His position is that the Christ of the Synoptics is historical but not Divine, whereas the Johannine Christ is Divine but not historical. He has been followed in his rambling by Father Tyrrell and others. The

¹ For a good account of Modernism see Canon McClure's *Modern Substitutes for Traditional Christianity*, p. 147-224.

most complete exposure of the whole movement was made by the Papal encyclical (*Pascendi*) which made clear that the demand of the Modernists is that everything that savours of the Divine should be eliminated from the history of Christ. To interpret the Gospels and the Creeds in a broad general sense with a free use of symbolism and imagination is as history has shown, an inclined plane leading down to Unitarian Deism and a non-miraculous religion of nature. Faith in Christ's miracles is inseparable from belief in His Incarnation. They follow from it; they establish it. To deny it is to deny them; to abandon them is to abandon it. Modern Unitarians have found it inconsistent with their position to retain miracles. The German Liberal Protestants who rejected the Virgin Birth, some years ago, have found it inconsistent with their position to believe in the Incarnation. "The truth about Jesus Christ," as stated in the work of Dr. Loofs, to whom Dr. Sanday refers as "one of the best and most cautious of the Germans," is by no means an orthodox Christology. If we are to regard our Lord as attributively and not substantially Divine, and to consider Him unique only in this, that no one was ever nearly so good as He; if we are to reject as due to the imagination of the Christian Church everything in His Life that transcends the natural physical order; if He was born as other men are; if His body, like other men's bodies, saw corruption; if His wonderful deeds are to be reduced to the sympathetic exertions of a spiritual force; if in all these things the Church has borne a false testimony, can we truly say that Christ was the Son of God save in symbol and metaphor. The Modernist feels the inconsistency of his position, for the Roman Modernist has fallen back upon the Church and its sacraments, the Protestant upon the Person of

Christ. And yet we have in Modernism practically the same arguments against Christ and the Church that we have already found in Strauss, Baur, Renan and the whole mythical school.

With regard to the Modernist position, it is to be noted that the Church of England is determined to stand by the facts of the Gospel. On April 30th, 1914, the Upper House of Convocation of Canterbury passed the practically unanimous resolution "That this House is resolved to maintain unimpaired the Catholic faith as contained in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and in the *Quicunque Vult*." And further, "That the denial of any of the historical facts stated in the Creeds goes beyond the limits of legitimate interpretation."

The Bishop of London, in his speech in the Upper House of Convocation, emphasized the danger of Modernism for the growing youth of the day. The older men, he hoped, would still maintain their belief in the Divinity of Christ, but the young men of the Universities and of the city had not reached belief, and he was certain that once let the non-miraculous Christ be accepted by the Church to-day, and the next generation could go a step further, and think of "the Palestinian Jew moving on the stage of history as nothing more than a deluded man." An excellent sketch of the history of Modernism is given in Canon McClure's *Modern Substitutes for Traditional Christianity*. Dr. N. J. White, of Dublin University, has well remarked that "if Modernism meant no more than the full and free application to the interpretation of ancient literature of modern methods and modern knowledge, all fair-minded men would be Modernists. But it means more than this; it means the testing of religious truths not by modern knowledge, but by the assumptions of some modern men,

assumptions which were made centuries ago by unbelievers."

With regard to the Virgin Birth, here we have only space to say with Ambrose, "*Talis decet partus Deum,*" such a nativity became our God. The denial of the Virgin Birth involves the denial of the historical truths of the opening chapters of St. Luke and St. Matthew, just as the rejection of all the Nature-miracles involves a rejection of many historical passages in all the Gospels. For a fuller account of the evidence may I refer the reader to my *Christ and His Critics* (Robert Scott). The principle of Parthenogenesis is recognized in certain departments of life by scientific men.

With regard to the Resurrection of Christ, we are quite ignorant of the conditions of life after death, and the nature of the body after death is the real crux. Why is it easier to believe in a spiritual survival than in a bodily resurrection? We have no experience whatever of disembodied spirits. It is surely contrary to the Gospel records to believe with M. Loisy, that our Lord's Body was taken down from the Cross by the soldiers and cast into a common ditch, where it would soon become unrecognizable. But it is not contrary to those records to hold that the Body was changed in and by its Resurrection, that it gradually became spiritualized and gradually prepared for a glorified condition, "The Body of His Glory." In the face of the Gospel evidence we have no right to say that the Incarnation and Resurrection, which might, of course, conceivably have happened in other ways, did not happen in these ways. The Scriptural statements may conflict with materialistic views, but they alone are in keeping with the transcendent position our Lord has held for centuries in the mind and heart of His Church.

Thirdly, with regard to the distinction Dr. Sanday

draws between the "Miracles of Healing" and "Nature-miracles," the former class of which he broadly accepts, we ask on what grounds the distinction is made. The Old Testament narratives of Elijah and Elisha which, he says, supplied the Apostles with prototypes of the Nature-miracles, could also have furnished prototypes of the other kind. But if the Gospels are taken at their face value, it seems impossible to attach more credence to some of the miracles of healing than to the Nature-miracles. Restoration of withered limbs cannot be explained as a cure by faith or suggestion. The whole question is one of evidence. If that evidence was sufficient to create the Christian Church, surely it ought to suffice those who belong to that Church. At all events, it is scientifically easier to believe that the Supernatural Christ created the Church than that the Church created the Supernatural Christ as the Modernists hold. For the latter position introduces an effect into the religious life of humanity for which it supplies no sufficient cause. There can be nothing more contrary to Nature for the materialist than the fact that a man who died nineteen centuries ago is now regarded by many as omnipotent and omnipresent.

In conclusion, the Church, in its warfare with this belief, may hope much from three facts (1) that science is gradually widening its outlook on life, and slowly withdrawing from its conception of the universe as controlled by the laws of mechanics; (2) that the modern philosophical systems of Eucken and Bergson, however mystical in tendency and conception, emphasize the transcendence of Spirit, and the existence of Spiritual creative force, and accordingly represent a reaction from the mechanical conception of the world; and (3) that modern criticism, Harnack's especially, has, by its own

independent researches, placed the documents of the faith upon a surer and more lasting basis.

Some of the arguments employed in this little work may appear somewhat old-fashioned to those familiar with the philosophies and theories of the last few years. But it is to be noted that the intelligent reading public has had barely time to become acquainted with these views, while those who have studied them closely, and are entitled to express an opinion, are not certain that they have the quality of endurance. Rev. J. M. Thompson's positions, of course, are known, and these are examined—I trust fairly—in detail.

June, 1914.

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THE PRESENT CONTROVERSY ON THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

CHAPTER I

GOSPEL MIRACLE IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN RESEARCH

THERE seems to be in our day much loose thinking, and even looser writing, on the subject of the miracles of the Gospels. The very possibility of the fact of such miracles, and the credibility of the narratives in which they are recorded, are questioned in an airy manner by the modern spirit of free enquiry. Many of us know, from our own experience, the terrible harm that has been done to young men in college, and often to mere boys at school, by the reckless and often irreverent criticism of the Scriptures that has been in vogue ever since modern Rationalism overleaped the barriers of reason.

The cause of Christ and His Church has, indeed, been impeded in the past by the intolerant spirit of its spokesmen. But that is no reason why we in this present age of unsettlement should make it more difficult for men to believe in Christ, and more easy for them to sit loose to the moral claims and spiritual sanctions of religion and the authority of the Christian Church. There is a certain section of Churchmen who are inclined to look with increasing favour upon, and to take their views from, the advanced schools of Germany, especially those (*e.g.*, Harnack's) that recognize the spiritual value of

our faith and the greatness of its Founder with sympathy and admiration. But the Church is not bound in any way to accept Harnack's view of the miracles and to reject those he rejected. The claim of Rationalism is twofold. On the one hand it demands to have the liberty to evolve its own creed unhampered by any religious consideration, tradition or sentiment ; and on the other hand it insists on having the liberty to attack the Christian Church, and to undermine, if possible, the Christian revelation, and regards a Christian protest as an intolerable impertinence. On one hand the Rationalists brandish their assumptions and tenets before our eyes ; and on the other they seek to deprive us of our own.

There is an active Rationalistic propaganda in our very midst. Our working classes are honeycombed with infidelity ; our professional classes are largely affected, and certain of our teachers have felt the subtle influence of the movement.¹ Rationalism will accept the Bible if allowed to interpret it in its own way. Its method of explaining the supernatural has always been to explain it away. The Gnostics of every age have demanded this privilege of removing what they did not see fit to accept in the Scriptures. And still, in spite of Gnosticism, ancient and modern, the Bible and the Church survive. We can well imagine how little of either would have remained had the Valentinian and the Marcionite schools had their way in the second

¹ Rev. C. J. Shebbeare (*Religion in an Age of Doubt*, p. 211) quotes with approval the definition of Rationalism that appeared in the advertisement of the Rationalist Press Association, p. ii. : "Rationalism may be defined as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason, and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and *independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority.*" The italics are ours.

century. Rationalism is opposed to the divinity of our Lord and the miracles of the New Testament. Accordingly, the Church must reconsider her position on these subjects and restate her views with considerable modification. Otherwise, forsooth, she will be acting with unjustifiable bigotry and intolerable egotism. She must, in a word, recognize Rationalism as the sole authority in spiritual matters. But the Christian Church has been entrusted with certain things, which she is bound to safeguard with all her might and power. She is also required to see that no injury be inflicted on the faith of her children, and therefore she must defend her position strenuously, unless she is inclined to demand "quarter" from those who have never shown her any. It therefore behoves us to go about the walls of our citadel, and see that the foundations and superstructure are sound, especially when we are informed that "the whole tendency of modern training is to make men suspicious of miraculous stories in whatever context they occur."¹

Now it is an undoubted fact that belief in the Divinity of our Lord created the Christian Church and made it what it is to-day. As we consider the work and position and progress of the Church in the world, we must confess that such an organization, called into existence and existing for the spiritual good of mankind, teaching divine truths, and leading men to higher ideals and levels of life, must have an equally worthy and noble origin. An extraordinary effect must have had an extraordinary cause. Was there no other ground for what the Germans call "the idealization of Jesus into the Christ" except "naïve piety"?² We are entitled to demand on what that "naïve piety"

¹ Rev. C. J. Shebbeare, *Religion in an Age of Doubt*, p. 67.

² Professor Schmiedel, *Jesus or Christ?* p. 79.

itself was founded. On a myth? On a delusion? On credulity? On superstition? On fancy? On pious imagination? ¹ Surely we know that from such causes no lasting or important effects can possibly flow. It is utterly impossible, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, abstractly and practically, that myth, delusion, or credulity could create a religion that was to survive the most perfectly organized persecution and the most fiendish cruelty humanity has ever experienced; and not only that, but was to overthrow the superstitions of the ancient world wherever it encountered them.

It is clear that the Church has a divine life within it, even the life of the Divine Spirit. Nothing less could have created it, nothing less could have sustained it. And the mission of the Church has ever been to testify to the Divinity of its Founder. Had His divinity not been believed in, had not that faith been dearer than life itself to His adherents, there is no doubt that Christianity would not be in existence to-day. "It is a very serious question whether we to-day should possess Christianity at all if Jesus had not been interpreted as a divine being," writes Professor Schmiedel. ² The Pauline Epistles, probably the first documents of the new Church, are a witness to St. Paul's faith in the Divinity of his Lord. It was on no abstract theory, much less on credulity, superstition, and imagination, but on facts that were more real to him than life that the Apostle built his doctrines of the Incarnation and Atonement. It was not even on "an ideal character that filled the hearts of men

¹ According to Rev. R. J. Campbell, the Christ is regarded by an increasing number as "an ideal figure traditionally associated with the name of Jesus, but in reality the cumulative product of our own *pious imagination*."—(*Jesus or Christ?* p. 180.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

with an impassioned love, that was capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions and was not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice,"¹ that he anchored his soul, but on the Lord, Who had converted, redeemed and sanctified him by His Spirit.

The idealization of Jesus into the Christ must, indeed, have proceeded at a great rate if in His own generation such a work could have commenced. There must surely have been conducive causes that raised our Lord to such a pinnacle of greatness in the eyes and hearts of His disciples, from which pinnacle Modernism and Rationalism attempt to remove Him, and to reduce Him to human proportions. The evidence that convinced the disciples that it was not a ghost that walked upon the waters (Matt. xiv. 26) or appeared unto them in the Upper Room after His Crucifixion (Luke xxiv. 37-39); that made them "witnesses of His Resurrection" (Acts ii. 31), whether we regard it as adequate or inadequate, was more than sufficient to overcome the doubts of men who were on the spot and were quite capable of verifying it, although they might not understand the proper scientific terms in which to describe what they saw, and what made them believe in the Divinity of their Master. Indeed, we hear of one among them who refused to believe until he had verified the evidence himself, and had seen for himself his Risen Lord. And the Gospel of St. Mark (xvi. 10-14) tells us, in a conclusion that embodies a true tradition, even if it is not his, that His disciples, "those who had been with Him," refused to believe Mary Magdalene and the two who had met Him in the country, and were rebuked for that unbelief by Him. That evidence is called in question to-day by those

¹ Lecky, *History of European Morals*, ii., 8.

who start with the assumption that miracles cannot and do not happen, and that the supernatural must be removed altogether from the Gospel and the interpretation of its phenomena. On the other hand Christianity is founded on a living faith that miracles have happened and do happen. Christianity itself is miraculous. "Its essence lies in a miracle; and if it can be shown that a miracle is either impossible or incredible, all further inquiry into the details of its history is superfluous from a religious point of view."¹

It is interesting to compare the respective attitudes of Bishop Gore and Canon Sanday to this momentous question. The former said at the Middlesbrough Church Congress (1912), "I speak as one who believes that the Church can admit on this matter no compromise." The latter, in his chapter on Miracles,² suggests a compromise so as "to make both ends meet, on the one hand the presuppositions of science, and on the other hand the presuppositions of religion; on the one hand the data of philosophy, and on the other hand the data of history." He says: "Deduct something perhaps from the historical statement of the fact, and add something to our conception of what is possible in the course of nature; and if the two ends do not exactly meet, we may yet see that they are not very far from meeting. The question is mainly one of adjustment."³ Practically, this suggestion amounts to this: "Make some allowance on the one hand for the work of imagination in the writers of the documents, and on the other for our ignorance and theirs of the laws of nature."

¹ Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 29.

² *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, c. viii., 1907.

³ p. 223. See his answer to Bishop Gore's *Challenge to Criticism*.

The balancing of these positions, however, tends to induce an attitude of indecision and incoherence. It would, indeed, be well if a reconciling formula or harmonizing statement could be discovered. But one that would minimise or reduce the supernatural element or power in our religion would only lead to an emasculated Christianity and an eviscerated Gospel which could never regenerate or save the world. It is growing clearer every day that the early Church believed in the supernatural, and was a living witness to the supernatural. At the same time, there can be no doubt that it would materially strengthen the positions both of Christianity and science if they could exist together, and reinforce one another as different interpretations of the same facts, different languages in which the same story is told. In three ways a *rapprochement* between our faith and modern science is to be noticed with thankfulness.

I.—In the first place, our conception of Deity has seen a wonderful change. God is no longer regarded as aloof from the world, existing in transcendent glory, and occasionally manifesting His existence and will to mankind by interventions and interpositions in, and interferences with, the recognized or usual order of things. But He is conceived as a Divine Presence and Spirit, not only transcendent but immanent in the Universe and in humanity, ever directing all things and ever pervading all things, and not displaying His activity only in the abnormal, occasional, and exceptional, but in the everyday and commonplace events of life. As Sir Oliver Lodge said before the British Association: "We are deaf and blind, therefore, to the immanent grandeur around us unless we have insight enough to appreciate the whole, and to recognize in the woven fabric of existence, flowing

steadily from the loom in an infinite progress towards perfection, the ever-growing garment of a transcendent God." This sacramental view of the Universe, as the visible sign of an invisible Presence, as real though immaterial as our mind is real though immaterial, is a great gain to us; it may help to convert the truce between science and religion into a lasting peace. It illuminates the Johannine use of the word "signs" for the works of Jesus, signs of a Divine power, revelations of a Divine order, manifestations of a Divine love.

II.—In the second place, our idea of law and their idea of law have been considerably modified. It is no longer necessary for us to define miracles as "visible suspensions of the order of nature for a providential purpose,"¹ or as "violations of natural law."² Law is not a cause. To regard it as such is to substitute the law for the law-giver. Law is a fact, not a force. Huxley defined "a law of nature in the scientific sense" as "the product of a mental operation upon the facts of nature which come under our observation." According to him, the "law" of gravitation has no objective existence, that is, no existence apart from our mind. Law is simply a generalization. Many such generalizations of science that were once regarded as axiomatic are now being questioned. "Philosophers," as Sir Oliver Lodge said,³ "have begun to question some of the larger generalizations of science, and to ask whether in the effort to be universal and comprehensive we have not exceeded our laboratory inductions too far. Physicists and mathematicians are beginning to consider whether the long-known and well-established laws of mechanics hold everywhere and

¹ Mozley, *Miracles*, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³ Presidential Address before British Association, Sept., 1913.

always, or whether the Newtonian scheme must be replaced by something more modern, something to which Newton's laws of motion are but an approximation." He goes on to say that even the laws of geometry have been overhauled, that the Conservation of Energy and the Constancy of the Mass are being questioned, and that Kepler's laws are not accurately true. Science has more data before it now, and regards the laws that were once considered infallible as but approximations. "In most parts of physics," he says, "simplicity has to give way to complexity, though certainly I urge that the simple laws were true and are still true, as far as they go, their inaccuracy being only detected by further real discovery. The reason they are departed from becomes known to us; the law is not really disobeyed, but is modified through the action of a known additional cause."

The confident tone of the scientists of the last century which found expression in such works as Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*, and such addresses as Tyndall's in Belfast, has given place to a vague doubtfulness of the axioms and conclusions of science, and a frank readiness to reconsider and restate the positions. Scientific dogmatism is dead. It is a gain in every way that each branch of human study and investigation should recognize its limitation. But chiefly is it a gain to theology. For science can no longer insist, with Hume, that miracle "is a violation of the laws of nature," or with Spinoza, that "miracles are in contradiction with the universal laws of nature," and therefore impossible. Even Huxley, agnostic as he was, recognized "not only that we are at the beginning of our knowledge of nature, instead of having arrived at the end of it, but that the limitations of our faculties are such that we never can be in a position to set bounds to the

possibilities of nature.”¹ Accordingly, to take a leaf out of the scientist’s note-book, the Christian apologist is not bound to define a miracle as a suspension or violation or interruption of law when it may but be “the modification of a law through the action of a known (or unknown) additional cause.” If it breaks laws we know, it is in obedience to causes we understand not, but which we have good grounds for believing to exist. Miracles are happening constantly in the world around us, but we do not regard them as miraculous simply because we have got used to them. Science has taught us that nothing is impossible save a contradiction in terms, that “there are impossibilities logical, but none natural.”² The Gospel phenomena may, therefore, be regarded as greater manifestations than usual, rather than unusual manifestations of the Divine power in our midst.

III.—In the third place, our conception of nature has been greatly enlarged. “The Universe is a larger thing than we have any conception of”; and “we are greater than we know.” There are many departments in the study of nature: geology, chemistry, physics, biology, psychology and theology. It is unfortunate that we are slaves to the habit of dividing all the phenomena of the Universe into two distinct classes or watertight compartments which we respectively call the “natural” and the “supernatural.” To the former class we assign all the activities of nature which are known and intelligible; and to the latter all that are unknown and unintelligible. The visible world is partitioned off from the invisible by a man-made barrier. The former is thought to be devoid of mystery, the latter to be full of it, whereas Huxley said, “The mysteries

¹ *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 198; Ed. 1894.

² Huxley. *ibid.*, p. 197.

of the Church are child's play compared with the mysteries of nature. The doctrine of the Trinity is not more puzzling than the antinomies of physical nature." ¹ "The ultimate nature of matter is incomprehensible," wrote Herbert Spencer. The whole of visible nature seems one great puzzle to those, on the one hand, who attempt to reconcile the conflicting theories of scientists on the subject of its matter and laws; and one great mystery, on the other hand, to those who have learnt with the help of science something of the marvels of its life and its life's environment. Are we not making objective a purely subjective distinction? That it is as old as Augustine may make it respectable, but cannot justify it. He sought to rectify it by writing: ² "We say that all miracles are contrary to nature, but they are not. For how can that be contrary to nature which takes place by the will of God, seeing that the will of the Creator is the true nature of everything created? So miracle is not contrary to nature, but only to what we know of nature" *Portentum fit non contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura.*

Canon Sanday ³ in discussing this passage seems to think that Augustine was only referring to physical nature. The Bishop of Ossory ⁴ interprets Augustine's use in a wider sense, "the nature of which He (God) is a part." Augustine surely included in the term all that may be the expression and realization of the Divine Will; the entire sphere in which the Divine Will energizes, of which sphere a very insignificant part comes within our ken. Does it not seem a concession to human weakness and limitation to make an unnatural division, which is

¹ See Gore's *Bampton Lectures*, 1891, p. 296.

² *De Civitate*, xxi., 8. ³ *Op. cit.*, p. 216; pp. 222, 223.

⁴ Hastings's D.B., *Miracles*, III., 381.

really due to human ignorance, in the whole harmonious scheme of God, in the grand totality of His creation, His nature? From the standpoint of God, and to His view, everything is natural, even what seems exceptional, abnormal, and mysterious to us, because it is part of His scheme, a piece of the fabric of His weaving. And from the standpoint of man, and to his view, everything is supernatural because it is part of the Divine plan, a portion of the vesture of Deity.

Accordingly, it is questionable if it be right at all to use the word "miracle" unless it be understood to be our subjective interpretation of a phenomenon we cannot understand. Our Lord Himself did not describe His own works as miracles or wonders (τέρατα). He does say with some scorn that the Jews would not believe except they saw signs and wonders (τέρατα John iv. 48), and that false prophets and false Christs would arise who would perform great signs and wonders (τέρατα), so as to deceive the very elect (Mark xiii. 22). But he expressly distinguishes His works (ἔργα) of beneficence, His signs (σημεῖα) of grace, to which He constantly refers in the Fourth Gospel, and which were to Him the natural outcome of His being, the outward expression of His inner life, from the mystifying feats and miraculous works of pretenders to supernatural powers which He was tempted to perform. Although He worked miracles and gave His disciples the power to work them, He would not permit that power to become a snare to them or others. "In this rejoice not," He said, "that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke x. 20.)

In conclusion, we may remark that the Christian apologist must adapt himself to the altered aspect of the problem. The old mechanical view of nature

which held the field for centuries from Bacon to Kant has given place to a mere teleological view, in the same way as a stiff Deism has been superseded by an inspiring Theism. We are not compelled to regard the physical and the spiritual as two completely distinct and separate departments of life. They present different aspects of God, which separately give an imperfect, but together a perfect revelation of Him. They differ from each other in degree, as the higher differs from the lower. In the uniformity of physical nature there is spiritual purpose, just as there is uniformity in the Spiritual order. A miracle can, therefore, be no longer regarded as a spiritual irruption into or interference with the physical order. For both domains are God's. He reveals Himself in both. He interferes with neither.¹ Accordingly, miracles must not be described as interferences. They are events in the physical order which are revelations and prophecies—signs—of a higher stage of being to which the lower leads and in which it will find its consummation.

¹ See Canon Aubrey Moore's *Science and Faith*, p. 100.

NOTE.—Luke x. 20 is quoted by Rev. C. J. Shebbeare (*op. cit.*, p. 93), to show that our Lord was "wholly at variance with his contemporaries in His estimate" of the worth of miracles. They were of course regarded by Him as ancillary to the spiritual proofs He gave of His own mission and nature, the revelation of the Divine love and light that won and warmed the hearts of men. But He certainly appealed to His "works" in John x. 25. "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. If I do [the works of my Father], though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in Him" (x. 38). And such "works" cannot be limited to His words, His preaching of the Kingdom, and His revelation of the Father, as Prof. Wendt holds (*Das Johannesevangelium*, p. 58), for we find in the discourses, from which "signs" are said to be excluded, a remarkable identification of sign and work. "What 'sign' showest thou? What dost thou work?" (John vi. 30).

CHAPTER II

THE GOSPEL PHENOMENA IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

THE Gospel phenomena and works associated with the name of Jesus are unique in this, that they were not wrought to fill men with amazement. The impulse to perform striking and notable works, that had no further end than to fill men with wonder and admiration, if He ever felt it, was overcome during His temptation (Matt. iv. 6). It was to satisfy human need, to remove human infirmity, to alleviate human misery and sorrow, to reveal the Father's love, and to give men the blessing of His own divine forgiveness that He performed His great works.

Certain people would explain away these miracles as being due to the ruling ideas and characteristic feelings of the age in which, and of the persons for which, they were said to be wrought. This is to beg the question. Men, indeed, must regard things from their own standpoint. The relativity of things, the manner in which they affect us, as Aristotle has taught us,¹ is what we and every generation are concerned with. But relativity does not get rid of objectivity. Suppose we are affected to-day by certain things which greatly impress us, and that the people of A.D. 3,000 will not be affected by them at all, would they be justified in saying that our feelings were purely subjective, of our own making, the offspring of superstition, credulity and ignorance, and that there was nothing to correspond with them objectively or outside us? But if we want to understand or believe the phenomena of the

¹ See the distinction between the relative and the absolute, the *πρὸς ἑμᾶς* and the *ἀπλῶς*, *passim*, in Aristotle's works.

Gospel, we need not attempt to define them as to their essence, that is, according to what they were in themselves, but rather to discover their bearings on those who were affected by them. And if we participate in our day in the results of the way in which those phenomena affected the first Christians—as we most surely do—can we assert that their impressions were purely subjective, and wholly due to the ruling ideas of their age?

Others again consider themselves at liberty to classify the Lord's deeds of power and mercy, and to reject those that do not appeal to them as due not only to the superstition of their own age, but also to the embroidery of a later age. May it not be, on the other hand, that the half has not been told us? (John xxi. 26.) The omissions of the Gospels are as remarkable as their admissions. The writers are very candid and honest, and relate everything in an impersonal and detached manner, extenuating nothing, and setting down nothing in malice, about the works of the Lord and the doubts of His own disciples (see Mark xvi., John xx. 25), of John the Baptist, as well as of the people (John xii. 37, Matt. xiii. 58.) In Mark vi. 6, He marvelled because of the unbelief of the people; in Mark xvi. 14, He upbraided the disciples with their unbelief; and in Matthew xxviii. 17, some of them doubted¹ even then. One might suspect that certain

¹ Sir Oliver Lodge in a lecture on Science and Religion (1904) gave "four possible categories" to one or other of which any alleged miracle might be assigned: (1) An orderly and natural though unusual portent; (2) a disturbance due to unknown live or capricious agencies; (3) a utilisation by *mental* or spiritual power of unknown laws; (4) direct interposition of the Deity. There is no space to criticise these categories. But a combination of the first and third, omitting *mental*, may help to throw light on many of the Gospel phenomena.

passages were written by agnostics. It was a dangerous experiment unless they were written, as we know they were, by men whose faith in the Lord's Divinity was so surely grounded, and for men whose faith was equally strong, that even a record of vacillation, failure, doubt could not shake them.

Indeed, it is evident that the Christian propaganda depended more upon the power of the Spirit of the Risen Christ convincing the conscience and reason of the disciples, than upon the written documents or accounts even of eye-witnesses in the first stages of the Church's history. But if we cut out the records of the wonderful works of Christ from the Gospel we shall lose many a beautiful sidelight into His character. We should be deprived of that revelation of His pity and power when He gave back his little girl to Jairus, restored her son to the weeping widow of Nain, and wept in sympathy with the sisters of Lazarus. Our Lord repeatedly appealed to His works as witnesses of His Character, Origin and Mission. "The works that I do in My Father's name they bear witness of Me" (John x. 25): "Or else believe Me for the very works' sake" (John xiv. 11). They were witnesses to men that He had power or authority (*ἐξουσία*) over all flesh (John xvii. 2); power of a special kind, in a higher sphere than the physical; power to forgive sins (Matt. ix. 6). He healed the paralytic and said to him: "Arise, take up thy bed and go into thine house," in order that the people might know that He had power to forgive sins, that the Lord of their bodies was also the Lord of their souls.

His miracles were in a certain sense His credentials. But they were only means to an end, and that end was the impressing the people with the fact of His Divine nature and authority. Yet He never did any of His great works in a haphazard way, but

with the fixed purpose in view to relieve human distress of body and soul. He Himself was a transcendent, unique, superhuman Personality. His character was radiant with Divine purity and beauty, and His influence in all ages has been most wonderful. This is admitted by those who doubt His Divinity. Exceptional events would then be what one would naturally expect to find in His earthly life. And they were found. Such phenomena from the standpoint of God would be but logical consequences; from the standpoint of those who believed in His Divinity, natural results; and for those who honestly doubted, signs that strengthened and confirmed faith. But for the curious and indifferent they were and are wonders and portents, and for the hostile either unnatural and impossible happenings, or at best sensational marvels. Our Lord seems, indeed, to have put a limit and restraint upon the exercise of His Divine powers. But when His human heart was most deeply stirred, the virtue that gave healing and life flowed most spontaneously from Him. Scientific proof is demanded. But if such were forthcoming it would be rejected as spurious and concocted, for the age was a non-scientific age. Some of the accounts may not be altogether scientifically accurate. But there can be no doubt at all about the sincerity and honesty of the first disciples. They showed themselves capable of doubting the evidence of their senses, and they were only convinced with great difficulty. But when convinced they lived and died for their convictions. The Church that condemned an Ananias would not stoop to propagate its creed and gospel by falsehood in any form.

The early disciples were honest men, who have left on record their misgivings and misunderstandings, misinterpretations and mistakes in

connection with their Master, Whom they only gradually learned to regard as their Lord and their God. Suppose such men saw an eclipse, would it not be an eclipse because they would not have the training to describe it in scientific terms? If they did use the terminology of science it would look as if they had borrowed the whole story. And because they were witnesses of the Resurrection and Ascension, was there no Resurrection or Ascension, because such are not described, forsooth, in scientific language, in language that does not conflict with our modern ideas? The witnesses of our Lord's Life and Passion, His works and His sufferings, were the sort of witnesses whose evidence in court is hardest to shake, because they were honest, simple, straight men, without presuppositions or prejudices. There may be no really scientific proof of these works of our Lord; but science cannot say they are impossible. As Huxley said: "There are impossibilities logical but none natural. A 'round square,' a 'present past,' 'two parallel lines that intersect,' are impossibilities because the ideas denoted by the predicates 'round,' 'present,' 'intersect,' are contradictory of those denoted by the subjects 'square,' 'past,' 'parallel.' But walking on water, or turning water into wine, or procreation without male intervention, or raising the dead, are plainly not impossibilities in this sense."¹

If there is no scientific proof, there are transcendent, spiritual, and moral proofs of these phenomena. (1) They were suitable to the Lord Himself, to His Character and Personality. (2) They were suitable to humanity. (3) They were suitable as a revelation of the Divine Father to men.

(1) They were suitable to our Lord Himself.

¹ *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 197.

There is nothing in any of His works but is consistent with the loftiness of His aim, the purity of His motive, the grandeur of His soul, the breadth of His sympathy. They are just the things that we should expect from One who had so human a heart and so Divine a power. Since the days of Hierocles¹ men have insulted Christianity by comparing with our Lord's Life, for which there were at least three lines of documentary proof before A.D. 70, Mark, Q and L,² the account of Apollonius of Tyana, who is said to have lived in the first century, by one Philostratus, who lived in the third, that is, over a hundred years later. That account, of which there are two modern translations by F. C. Conybeare and Professor Phillimore, is full of anachronisms, geographical blunders, and prodigies, is unscientific and untrustworthy, and is regarded even by partial critics as a romance. All that is good in it is derived from and inspired by Christianity. From it emerge a few facts which may be regarded as plausible. But the most has been made of it by the antagonists of our faith to disprove the originality of the Gospels. Granted that Apollonius lived a noble, simple, ascetic life; that he performed many wonderful works, such as raising the dead and disappearing suddenly from view; and that he laid down the principles of a lofty morality and even of a spiritual life. What was the outcome of it all? Did he inspire a single follower to die for him? Did he create a living Church out of eleven timid, wavering disciples? In all the teaching and marvellous works ascribed to him is there anything to fire the

¹ His work was called *A True Discourse against the Christians*. It was answered by Eusebius in his *Book against Hierocles*. Voltaire repeated the absurd argument of Hierocles.

² See note at end.

heart with love for man, and the soul with love for God? It is just here that the splendour of the Gospel of Christ shines forth, in the inspiration it gives to man to live the higher life, in the sublime ideals it has created, in its attractiveness for all sorts and conditions of humanity, in its adaptability to all the circumstances of human life, in its sufficiency for all the needs of man.

Our Lord's very use of His Divine power is a proof of His Divinity. It is only when men really love Him as their best Friend that His Divinity, His glory, becomes manifest to them. If we love Him sincerely He will help us to believe in Him with equal confidence.¹ He would never reveal Himself to those who disliked or opposed Him in His earthly life. And so it has ever been since. He brings us gradually on from the *φιλία* or the personal affection that clings, to the *ἀγαπή* or the love that adores. By appealing to all that is truest and best in man He develops and fosters in us that deepest and highest impulse of the human soul to find itself in God, and to realize God in itself, to feel after God, to be fed and led by God, to desire Him above all else, "we in Christ and Christ in us." See this use of the verb *ἀγαπᾶω* (*ἀγαπᾶς*) in our Lord's conversation with St. Peter (John xx. 15-20). This is the "charity" of St. Paul,² the charity that gives itself wholly to God, not the charity of modern parlance that merely doles out alms to the poor. It

¹ Ritschlianism has done well in emphasizing the inwardness, the inner experience, of religion as its fundamental basis. It is only by personal experience that the religious knowledge that counts in our life is attained. We must experience God as a principle within us before He can be a Person without us. We shall join issue with Ritschlianism on other points in subsequent chapters.

² The *caritas* Christi or dearness of Christ in St. Patrick's *Confession* (c. xxxiii., etc.).

was to awaken that love in the hearts of men to His Father and Himself and the Divine Spirit that He wrought His works of love, mercy and grace. It was that adoring love, that noble passion for Him that eventually taught His disciples to regard Him as their Lord and their God. And that love was gradually fostered in them by His wonderful tact and the Divine love that conquered the powers of nature in their defence, and overcame death in order to return to them and endow them with His immortal Spirit. The works that are associated in the Gospels with the name of Jesus were accordingly in keeping with the character, purpose, and ideals of the Christ Himself. They were the logical expression of His nature, and in rational sequence with the Person who wrought them.

(2) They were suitable to humanity, fit to meet the requirements and able to satisfy the needs of humanity. There is nothing so remarkable in our day as the great change in men's opinions concerning the relation of matter and spirit. Materialism has certainly been compelled to speak low in an age when the spirit is resuming its own place. The supremacy of mind and will over matter is conspicuous in many departments. Force is held by the psychologist to be the explanation of, and the ultimate reality of the human personality in the form of will and spirit. Force is believed by the Christian to be the cause and support of the Universe, as Intelligent, Personal, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent Spirit. Man can exercise a remarkable control not only over animate beings like himself, but also over the inanimate world, by means of this great power at his disposal. What tremendous force there must have been latent in the God-man ! And what a tremendous restraint He must have put upon the exercise of it ! He emptied Himself of His glory and humiliated

Himself, says St. Paul (Phil. ii. 7, 8). Whether that self-emptying was a continuous process during His incarnate life, or an antecedent condition of such an incarnation we are not in a position to say. He seems, indeed, to have limited Himself designedly, and only to have manifested His powers in the presence of human misery and want, weakness and woe, peril and sorrow. We observe in many places that He seems to control Himself and restrain Himself—to speak with all reverence—as one Who was keeping Himself in check.¹ But in response to human needs and requirements He never delayed to put forth His power. The greater the want and the pathos of the situation the more nearly it touched His heart, the more instantaneous and wonderful was His action. And how suitable that action! His restoration of nature to its original perfection—that is, to the Divine idea of it—was in keeping with the harmony of things, was natural in the highest sense, and, accordingly, was most appropriate in the Head of our race, as well as in the subjects of His mercy. It was more natural for the lame to walk than to limp, for the blind to see, for lepers to be whole, for sinners to cease from sin, if we use human nature in its highest sense of what God intended man to be when He made him after His Divine idea, symbolically expressed as “image and likeness” (Gen. i. 26). Therefore our Lord’s work was essentially a natural work for Him and for man. It was in the direction of the purification and the restoration of the human body, soul and spirit, to that condition in which the Divine Maker intended them to exist and to develop. This was surely not only a suitable work for the Redeemer and

¹ Mark vi. 5 : “And He could there do no mighty work” (δύναμιν). Matt. xiii. 58 : “And He did not many mighty works (δύναμεις) because of their unbelief.”

Saviour of our manhood, but also a suitable work for humanity.

Some one may say here, " Was it suitable for Him to bring a man back from death to face death again ? " " Was it suitable for Him to walk upon the waters ? " In answer to the first query, even if we did know all the circumstances of the case when He gave life to the dead, we should not be qualified to judge them unsuitable. For is it not the most natural impulse when we kneel by our beloved dead to desire to have them restored to us ? It was then most natural that the Son of Man should Himself feel the same impulse, and having the power, should put it forth in answer to the prayers of others, showing thereby that He had the keys of life and death. But what if Lazarus was raised from the dead not only to comfort and support his sisters, when the Master had withdrawn from their visible communion, but to do a great work for his beloved Lord, Who made his house the headquarters of His last mission, after His Resurrection ? May not the restoration of His life not only have given happiness to his sisters, but an ineffable happiness to himself, called back as he was to be of some service to Him he loved and adored, and to be a remarkable witness of his Lord's Divine beneficence in the years that followed His death, Passion and Resurrection ? There are few Christians that would not envy Lazarus his experience.

With regard to the episode of our Lord walking on the waters to meet and save His disciples ; some have tried to explain it away by rendering the reading ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν (Matt. xiv. 28) as " along the shore."¹ However, St. Mark's reading ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης cannot be so explained. What could be

¹ But see the use of ἐπὶ in Matt. xiii. 2, where it governs the accusative (" the people stood on the shore ").

more appropriate or more in keeping with the character and nature of the Son of Man than the part He played in this scene? To be deprived of that glimpse into His nature and His relation to His disciples would be a great loss. It is not, however, the wonder of it that touches our hearts, but it is the symbolical lesson it teaches of Him Who passes over the stormy billows of life, "the waves of this troublesome world," to save His people from fear and peril, and to bring them to the haven where they would be, probably at the very moment when their strength has failed, and they have given up hope of safety. As we regard the feeding of the starving multitudes as throwing an anticipatory light on the Sacrament of the Holy Communion in which we are fed by the Bread of Life, may we not regard this episode as throwing an anticipatory light upon the Sacrament of Holy Baptism? In the Sacrament the Lord sanctifies the water to the mystical washing away of sin. In that scene on the lake He sanctified the fear and danger of His disciples, as He ever sanctifies the pain and peril, the sorrow and weakness of His people, to the spiritual purification of their souls. The waters of Baptism may lead one to the Christ, but they are powerless to uphold or save him if he looks away from the Christ. For faith then will surely fail. But from all the perils and dangers into which our own self-confidence, or our want of faith in God may lead us, there is a Divine Hand stretched out to save us and to lead us home. Was it not suitable that He Who supplied the needs of those who trusted Him should rescue them from a watery grave? This view is only put forward tentatively, and may not appeal to many. But it is in keeping with the allegorical figures, apologues and signs of the Fourth Gospel, which are parables in action. The Master's hand stretched

out to save His disciple from the stormy waves—waves that he might not have feared on another occasion when he was not attempting the impossible for man—is a picture the Church will not readily surrender, and Christianity will not easily sacrifice to the critics. The whole episode is in perfect keeping with all we read of the Saviour and of His impulsive and warm-hearted follower. There are, moreover, naïve touches in it, the consternation of the disciples, their natural suspicion at first that it was a ghost, the recklessness of Peter, his readiness to show his faith and his courage, and his poor failure—which show the hand of the eye-witness. These are not like the inventions of a later age. Here a protest must be made in the name of Christianity against the habit of speaking of our Lord and His miracles in the same breath and sentence with “the floating axe-head of Elisha,” “Balaam’s ass,” and “Jonah’s whale.” This habit gives grave offence to those who love and adore their Saviour; and it is this habit that is answerable for a great deal of that intense feeling of hostility to the miracles of the Gospel which finds expression in the books and magazines of our day. Our Lord’s deeds of wonder and grace do not stand in the same category as the miracles of the Exodus, or of the Elijah-Elisha period. The evidence is totally dissimilar, the personages are quite distinct, and the moral and religious lessons are on very different levels. If Christians and Churchmen mark well this distinction they will give less occasion to their opponents to blaspheme.¹

¹ Cf. Dr. Temple, *Bampton Lectures*, 1884, p. 207: “No such evidence can now be produced on behalf of the miracles in the Old Testament. The times are remote; the date and authorship of the Books not established with certainty; the mixture of poetry with history no longer capable of any sure separation into its parts. . . . But in the New Testament we stand on different ground.”

(3) In the third place our Lord's works were intended to be a revelation of the Father's character, sympathy, and power, as well as of His own. See how humbly and yet how proudly—proud of His Father, like a true Son—He refers to His works as the works the Father had given Him to finish (John v. 36), as the works of His Father (x. 37), the works that He did in His Father's name (x. 25), "the works that none other man did" (xv. 24). He also said, "Many good works have I showed you from My Father" (x. 32). The Father was both the source of His power and the object of His devotion. The works that were done by Him were wrought according to the Father's plan. Everything else was made subservient to this great purpose—to make known His Father to man. It was not His rôle to attract men by wonderful feats of magic such as an Apollonius of Tyana or a Simon Magus might have done, or attempted to do, and such as Hindu jugglers perform to-day, but to win men to love goodness and God by His doctrine and His revelation of the Father's will and mind. He appealed to the Father as the Divine Witness of the Son to men (John viii. 18); and He claimed to be the witness of that Father to men, saying, "He that sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him" (John viii. 26), and "I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things" (viii. 28). He referred both His works and His words back to His Father, of Whose inspiring and loving companionship He speaks in the next verse, "The Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him." And He offers mankind a test of the truth of His words. "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man willeth¹ to do His will, he shall know

¹ Faith is primarily an act of will, and devotion to

of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself" (John vii. 16, 17). He was the great Teacher sent from God to instruct mankind in the things of God and in the things pertaining to the higher and the future life. There is nothing trivial, nothing pedantic in His utterances. His words are the words of life because they breathe the spirituality and vigour of God, and have a divine grace and charm that nothing earthly did create. In a marvellous manner word answers to work, and work corresponds with word in the economy of the Incarnate Life. The work manifests His divine power, and stamps His word with the seal of truth; while the word is a manifestation of His divine wisdom, and illumines and immortalises the work. And both His word and His work, both His wisdom and His power reveal the Father's love and the Father's will to man, while they save and redeem him from the taint and power of sin, and train and educate him for the higher life.

We only read of our Lord writing at one time in His earthly life, and on that occasion He wrote in the dust (John viii. 6). But the words He spoke and the works He wrought, the expression of His mind and the manifestation of His will, can never be obliterated. For they were engraved on the hearts and souls He saved from sin and led to God. His inscriptions, His documents, are living epistles that will never die. The lives He raised and blessed, and ever raises and blesses, bear witness to His saving grace, His healing power, and the spiritual attractiveness of the uplifted Christ.

We could not understand the Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament, especially the writings of St.

Christ implies a surrender of will. According to Kant nothing is unconditionally good save a good will. Notice how our Lord lays emphasis on the will.

Paul, without the Gospel narratives of the Divine Life, of which they form the spiritual supplement. In the Acts, which was compiled by St. Luke, an eye-witness of many of the scenes described, as Harnack maintains, we move in an atmosphere of miracle. In the Pauline Epistles there are allusions to many wonderful powers (see 1 Cor. xii.). St. Paul says, "The signs of an apostle were done among you, in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. xii. 12). If this happened in the case of St. Paul, how much more in the case of One Whom St. Paul recognized as his Master, Saviour, Lord and God. Surely from such a Divine Person not only healing but life went forth.

I would conclude with a quotation from a book of my own—¹ "There are many who honestly doubt His divinity. It is impossible, they say, to deify a man. It would, indeed, be impossible for us who are men to raise a man like ourselves to a divine position. But if He were not altogether like ourselves, if He were superhuman, why should we not give Him His divine honours? His Divinity has been believed for nearly two thousand years. The burden of proof, therefore, lies upon those who declare Him to be but human after all. Let them fairly prove that He was so; and without depending upon such questionable and absurd theories as legend, tendency, vision, imagination, and hypnotic power, let them explain the uniqueness of His Personality, the triumph of His Cross, the marvellous perfection of His revelation and character, and that never dying principle of spiritual regeneration which He has been, and is, and shall be to the end of the age."

¹ *The Mystery of the Cross*, p. 43 (1904).

NOTE ON THE GOSPEL SOURCES.

(A) With regard to St. Mark's Gospel, Dr. Harnack says : " Everything that stands in this Gospel was already in circulation before the year A.D. 70 or, as others think, soon afterwards " (*Luke the Physician*, p. 161). Dr. Wendling (*Ur-Marcus*, p. 26) refers a portion of this Gospel containing miraculous narratives, M¹, to St. Peter, and another source, M², also containing records of miracles, to " a living tradition concerning Jesus." These documents, both containing accounts of miracles, would, therefore, have been compiled long before A.D. 70. (B) With regard to Q, which stands for *Quelle*, a written source used by Luke and Matthew, which has been reconstructed by Harnack and B. Weiss, both including miraculous narratives in their arrangement of it. With regard to its date Prof. K. Lake, of Leyden, says : " It is probably not too much to say that every year after A.D. 50 is increasingly improbable for the production of Q." (*Expositor*, June, 1909). According to Harnack (*The Sayings of Jesus*, pp. 247-249), there is a strong balance of probability that Q is a work of St. Matthew. Jülicher and he agree that there was an Aramaic original of it. (γ) L is the special source of St. Luke (*Lukasquelle*), according to B. Weiss. In his arrangement of L. there are seven miraculous narratives. L consisted of Judæan or Jerusalem traditions used by St. Luke. Harnack thinks they were oral, but Weiss that they had been committed to writing in Judæa by one who obtained several of these traditions from the Virgin. See *Die Quellen der Synoptischen Tradition* (pp. 172, *et seq.*). L is assigned to a date previous to A.D. 70. Accordingly we have three independent lines of tradition before A.D. 70 to support the miracles of Jesus. It may be added that Ven. W. C. Allen says, " I think it probable that critical opinion will shortly move in the direction of, say, A.D. 60, as suggested by Harnack, for the Third Gospel, and A.D. 50, or shortly before, for the publication of a Greek Second Gospel " (*Expos. Times*, July, 1910) ; while Dr. V. Bartlet holds that a common apostolic tradition of deeds as well as words of Jesus lies behind all our Synoptics as distinct from a Q containing only discourses (*Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problems*, pp. 359, *seq.*).

CHAPTER III

MIRACLES TRUE AND FALSE

THE problem that confronts the Church of every age and, indeed, every Christian and religious community, is the difficulty of how to maintain the authority of the body without the sacrifice of the individual's freedom. In our Church there is little attempt to crush independence of thought, and the consequence is that there is a looseness or vagueness of expression in the pronouncements of its leading writers which a stronger sense of what is due to the body would at least make more definite. This fact, however, may be just as much due to this, that the faith in the increasing light of science and knowledge has lost much of the fixity and definiteness of its contour. Hence the necessity for a central authority arises, one that can say what is vital to our faith and what is merely accessory, and what are the absolutely essential, and what are the purely accidental elements of our belief. The general trend of science and knowledge is to cause the present generation to hesitate before laying down the law, to wait before giving a decision even upon what seem the most momentous matters, and to accommodate its views of Scripture and other things to the so-called assured results of the higher criticism.

Our toleration and liberal-mindedness, are at once our pride and our weakness. People have grown careless in their own expressions and statements of faith, and indifferent to the expressions and statements of faith of others, chiefly because they have ceased to care at all for these things as they should be cared for. The question then arises, should

not the authority of the Body¹ make itself felt in tightening our grip on the essentials of the faith? The eye of the scholar absorbed in the attempt to harmonise passages, to discover subtle distinctions, to trace uncertain clues, to analyse sections, to recover original readings, to weigh the evidence of authorities, and to balance one authority against another, has lost in a measure its sense of perspective and proportion; and the scholar himself is in danger of losing his grasp of central truths while engaged in a literary and academic study of, or search for, "sources." While small matters are magnified out of all proportion, the great matters pass out of sight and mind. Newton and Kepler, did they live in our day, would be so occupied with minor disturbances and facts that they would never have seen the great cosmic movements and principles of nature, and so would never have formulated their immortal laws. Is it any wonder that in the higher sphere of study the cosmic facts of life are put aside while the text is being dissected? We must beware lest the consideration of the comparatively infinitesimal obscure our vision of the comparatively infinite, lest petty details should thrust out great problems.

One of these problems that is troubling the Church

¹ According to Ritschl, who dispenses altogether with miracles, metaphysics, and theology, religion makes its primary appeal to the individual conscience, and its proper sphere is the individual experience. But he also demands recognition for the redeemed community, and surely such cannot subsist upon the subjective impressions or convictions of its members. There must be some outward (and therefore objective) link of doctrine or belief expressed in a formula of value. The community has a right, even from his point, to control the convictions of its members. The Christian may exist without doctrine, but doctrine is essential to the Church.

of our day is whether a belief in the miracles of the Gospel is essential or not. May we regard them with indifference, and affect to consider them as just the primitive way of regarding the results of medical art or personal magnetism? May we take refuge in the school of Ritschl and hold that Christianity must justify itself by its appeal to spiritual experience without taking its miraculous element into account at all? Or must we believe that they actually did take place in the manner described, and that they were really works which the unaided skill or art of man—however highly and phenomenally developed—could never accomplish? Some of our leaders answer the first question in the affirmative, a few answer the second, and others answer the third in the same way.

We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there is in our day a growing opposition to the miraculous, especially to the miracles of the Gospel. This opposition is more often unexpressed than open, passive than active, and frequently takes the form of the complete abandonment of public worship. Many are frankly and fairly agnostic. The pendulum in their case has swung back from a too rigid authority to a too careless freedom. We are compelled to ask the question: Is it right for us to emphasize the miracles of the Gospel, if that emphasis leads to such undesirable consequences? Perhaps it is as injudicious to emphasize them as it is to overlook them. We may hold that miracles have accomplished their great end, and proved to men the supernatural origin of our faith; that we are moving and living in a different era of Providence, and do not require even to hear of them much less to believe them; and that in fact their day is past, and in a practical age such "sensational marvels" need not be introduced even in conversation.

But what then would be the result to the world if the spokesmen of the Christian religion—its modern prophets and teachers—were to give the world to understand that it did not seriously matter whether one regarded our faith as supernaturally given and established, or as the result of the natural evolution and logical development of previous religions? Do we at all reflect what the reduction of Christianity to a natural religion would mean for the world? What an emasculated thing Christianity deprived of its revealed truths would be? Empty of the love, deprived of the warmth, zeal, influence and driving power of its doctrines of Incarnation, Atonement, and Salvation, it would be practically cut down to a system of benevolent deism or a complaisant morality, without intellectual or spiritual difficulties, and with its ethical problems pared down to a minimum. What has such a system as Mohammedanism, based upon the weakness of man and the indulgence of Deity, done to raise and elevate human life and standards of living? We do not hold with Mahomet that "God would make His religion an ease unto man." There are many, however, in this age when everything is made easy for the learner and the toiler, when short cuts to knowledge are the rule, who would put an end to every mental problem and moral probation. The very discipline of faith would be cut away by those who would have belief in Christian doctrines itself made easy. What a limp and sickly thing would such a faith be, nourished upon moral lollipops and spiritual tabloids! Not exactly the kind of thing that faced the most cruel of deaths in the arena, and with a smile, rather than sacrifice to the divinities of Rome, rather than deny its Lord and Master Christ, rather than recognize Nero as Divine. It has been well said by a writer in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*

that "The present generation is suffering more or less from a theological dyspepsia, which seeks relief in bilious criticism of the fundamentals of spiritual health." There are difficulties; we cannot deny the fact, nor can we get away from it, and there are bound to be difficulties *a priori* not only in the manner the great Father chose to reveal His will, His purpose, His love, His mind and His character to mankind, but also in man's understanding and grasping of such a revelation. There is no plain sailing here. But for the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the knowledge that He gave of God and the knowledge we have of Himself, how little would we know of either the nature of God or of the nature of man!

But there is no need to make these difficulties still greater for the faith of our generation. It is quite possible that the efforts of certain critics may be genuinely and sincerely intended to simplify matters, if not for others, at any rate for themselves. But it cannot be denied that a great deal of their work, however laborious and instructive, is coloured by a hostile prejudice, and is patently destructive in its aim. The opponents of a miraculous Christianity may find many a weapon to their hand in the writings of modern criticism; while those who believe are so frequently deceived by the secretly concealed cynicism, the subtly woven argument, that they do not for some time, if ever, perceive the hostile bias. There are some honest critics who frankly discover their object. While they express their satisfaction that "thanks to anthropology as well as physical science, the idea and fact of miracle, has, to a large extent, lost its prestige,"¹ they ask, "May not Christianity be fundamentally supernatural, as the word and work of God, without being

¹ Writer in *Church of Ireland Gazette*, September 22nd, 1913.

at the same time fundamentally miraculous in any sense involving conflict with modern ideas? ”¹ They openly compare the miracle-stories in the New Testament with what they are pleased to term “analogous cases,” which they assert can “be found on almost every page of history.”²

Mr. Thompson gives an elaborate account of the mediæval stories of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi and of the manner in which they were magnified, leaving his readers to draw the conclusion that the origin and growth of such miracle-stories, apparently composed in the interests of a certain order of monks, and conveying no moral lesson, are a worthy illustration of the origin and growth of the miracle-stories of the New Testament. Mr. Thompson has more credulity when any other miracles, save those of the Gospels, are concerned than the readers of his previous pages would give him credit, unless they discovered the paradox of modern criticism that it is quite possible for a critic who appeals to common-sense³ to be somewhat reckless in what he does believe himself. He actually says with regard to these stigmata, “As to the main fact here alleged—the appearance of the stigmata—no reasonable doubt can be raised,”⁴ because, “the evidence of Brother Elias is corroborated by that of his opponent, Brother Leo,” who, be it remembered, was a member of the same order.

For the benefit of our readers we state that St. Francis died on Saturday, October 3rd, 1226; that on the next day Brother Elias, his vicar, wrote a letter in which he described the stigmata, saying

¹ Same writer. (The reader will distinguish between critics and critics).

² J. M. Thompson, *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 219.

³ “It is not materialism which rejects miracles, but common-sense” (*Ibid.*, p. 218).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

that "Not long before his death he appeared as one crucified, bearing in his body five wounds, which are in truth the marks of Christ." Mr. Thompson admits that "The body was buried on the morning after death, and Elias's letter is the only written description by an eye-witness."¹ Yet he goes on to say, "As to the main fact here alleged, the appearance of the stigmata, no reasonable doubt can be raised." It amounts to this, that all the evidence is the word of one interested person, on which the hurried interment of his master must throw considerable suspicion, and yet this is sufficient to make him believe that "miracle"!

To proceed. Thomas of Celano, a year or so later, improves upon Elias's account. He, without any evidence at all, converts the marks into growths. "The heads and points of the nails could be seen," he said, "sticking out of the man's body!" The author of the Appendix to the *Vita Prima* improves still further upon that, and without any fresh evidence. It now comes out that the stigmata of the saint were well known to the brethren before his death, and that the nails themselves were made of the saint's own flesh. But Bonaventura (1260), in his official *Life*, denies this. He says that only Elias and Ruffinus knew of the stigmata during the saint's life. While Matthew Paris² in 1259 embodies in his chronicle the account of Roger of Wendover, according to which the stigmata appeared fifteen days before the saint's death, and were seen by a large crowd, to whom the dying saint announced a new miracle—namely, that the bleeding wounds they saw would at the moment of his death be closed up. Accordingly, "when he was dead, there remained not a single mark, either in side or feet

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

² *Chronica Majora*, iii., p. 134.

or hands, of the wounds described." For all this no evidence is offered. This last story it would seem was invented in order to forestall any attempt on the part of rival parties to disturb the body and discover the true facts. Is such a story to be compared in its contradictions, and its exaggerations, and its puerilities to the sublimity and naturalness of the records of our Lord's Resurrection? What is the answer of "common-sense" to this question?

Again, Mr. Thompson proceeds to say that a "chronological account and critical analysis of the materials" for the *Life and Legend of St. Catherine* by Baron von Hügel "throws so much light on our problem that some account must be given of it." Von Hügel is described as tracing the tendencies at work in the successive layers of tradition as to the life and teaching of St. Catherine—the contemporary documents and the various *Lives*. In his remarks upon the *Dialogo* of 1550, he is reported to have said that all the materials of the earlier work, the *Vita* of 1547, "have been re-thought, re-pictured, re-arranged throughout by a new, powerful and experienced mind."¹ Again he says "the *Dialogo* writer of 1550 combines the most detailed dependence on the materials of the *Vita* proper with the most sovereign independence concerning the chronology, context and drift of those same materials." Then the *Dicchiarizione*, he says, "introduces a number of theological 'corrections' into Catherine's teaching, principally on the subject of purgatory, about which Papal declarations unfavourable to Catherine's teaching had lately been made."² Mr. Thompson would have us believe that this same tendency to alter, exaggerate, and correct

¹ *Mystical Element in Religion*, Part II., Appendix.

² *Ibid.*, p. 227.

the traditions of a mediæval biography is to be traced in the composition of the Gospels. It is no doubt true that traditions of the saints are exposed to the elaboration of successive redactors. But is it true that such a work of elaboration and radical alteration was allowed by the Church and the Divine Spirit of God to be carried on in connection with the Gospels? In his previous pages Mr. Thompson has attempted to establish this point, but he is not convincing. The question is this, is Irenæus, a sensible, learned and able critic of the last portion of the second century, to be trusted less in the matter of the Gospels and their composition than a critic of the twentieth century? Criticism may bring out interesting points about the composition, and discover, perhaps, superior readings, but for the criticism of the twentieth century to oppose the broad findings and general statements of the second century with reference to matters of the first, would be the same as for the savants of the fortieth century to dispute with us of the twentieth the authorship and composition, say of Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, on the ground that one Johnson, an English critic of the same century, said to one Boswell, "Swift has a higher reputation than he deserves. His excellence is strong sense, for his humour, though very well, is not remarkably good. I doubt whether the *Tale of a Tub* be his, for he never owned it, and it is much above his usual manner." What volumes the critics of the fortieth century would write to maintain Johnson's contention and to disparage Swift, and dispute his authorship of the *Tale of a Tub* on the grounds of his alleged lack of humour, poverty of style and the anonymity of the work, if these critics will at all resemble the critics of this age, who, on the strength of Eusebius's one scornful reference to Papias as

"small minded,"¹ are inclined to ignore the excellent work that man did in collecting and sifting Apostolical traditions, and to cast doubts upon his remarks regarding the authorship and composition of the first and second Gospels.²

Finally, a parallel is instituted by Mr. Thompson between the Evangelical record of our Lord's Miracles and Death and Passion and the various accounts which have been critically edited by Dr. Edwin Abbott, for the Rolls Series, in his *St. Thomas of Canterbury* of the so-called martyrdom of Archbishop Becket, and the alleged miracles that ensued, in order to reduce the sacred narratives to the level of ecclesiastical hagiography, which is known to be the least reliable kind of writing in the world, and so to disparage their veracity and weaken their evidence.

Even if we grant that miraculous cures took place in connection with Francis of Assisi and Thomas Becket, we have modern instances of alleged cures at Lourdes of diseases. The very fact that little or no medical evidence of any value is forthcoming for such cures makes the case all the more similar. Until the children, who as surgical "cases" are brought to Lourdes by priests, are properly examined

¹ Eusebius, *H.E.*, iii., 39.

² "Matthew composed the oracles (τὰ λόγια) in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could." "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, but did not record in order what was said and done by Christ. For he did not hear nor follow the Lord, but afterwards attended Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs of his hearers, but had no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles (τῶν κυριακῶν λογίων). So Mark made no error, writing down some thing as he remembered them; for he made it his special care to omit nothing of what he heard and to set down no false statement therein."

by medical men appointed by the State before and after their visit, we are advised by Roman Catholic surgeons of repute to withhold our belief in these "cures." What Christian would venture to compare those cures with the miraculous manner in which our Lord healed men's bodies in order to show them that He could heal their souls? What external evidence is there for the later miracles of the saints, which are of a distinctly different order? They were at best the offspring of the love and veneration of priests and people for their departed leaders and martyrs. It is not improbable that the ecclesiastics' desire for power and sometimes even considerations of profit served to popularize such customs as pilgrimages to the shrines of saints and devotions to their relics, notably at Canterbury. There is nothing of this kind connected with the miracles of the New Testament? Neither were they wrought to trade upon the credulity of superstitious folk. They were "signs" of a Divine Presence in the world, designedly wrought to uplift the minds and hearts of folk, simple and learned, to the higher things of God, and were not only exhibitions of power, but also of goodness and love and wisdom. They were not without proof, proof which satisfied the early Christians that Jesus was not only their Christ, their Messiah, but that He was also the Lord from Heaven, the Divine Son of God, the Word of God, the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

On the other hand, with regard to the miracles of the Apocryphal Gospels and of the *Acta Sanctorum*, the mediæval and modern miracles of the Roman Catholic Church, what lesson do they teach humanity? Are they signs (*σημεῖα*) in any sense, and what spiritual message do they convey? The history of the Christian Church is unaffected by the truth or

falsehood of these miracles. Indeed, the Church would have been much better without them, as they bring a certain amount of discredit upon it.¹ Whereas if the Gospel miracles of the Incarnation and Resurrection were not true, there would have been no history of the Church to write. Have we any parallel to the miracles with which Mr. Thompson compares the Gospel miracles? We believe we have one in Strype's *Life of Archbishop Parker*. In 1559 the order was given to remove all images from Christ Church Cathedral, so a miracle was arranged to take place on Sunday, September 3rd. The marble image of Christ was seen to sweat blood during the service, whereupon there was great confusion, people falling upon their knees and beating their breasts. But the Archbishop ordered the sexton to examine the statue, and he found a sponge which had been soaked in blood on the head within the crown of thorns. Hence the drops of blood. The perpetrator, one Leigh, a monk, was afterwards discovered.

The purpose of true miracles, to lead the mind from the visible to the invisible, from the outward sign to the object and end of all such wonderful works, God's work in the heart of man, was well described by Gregory the Great of Rome. He said: "When Paul came to Malta and saw the island full of unbelievers, he healed the father of Publius by

¹ Of course I do not refer in this statement to the faith-healing which is done in connection with the Anglican and American Churches, and which seems *bona fide*, and is even said to include cancer; for it is done with prayer and without parade. See Report of the Society of Emmanuel, of which Mr. J. M. Hickson is President and Bishop Mylne Vice-President, and which was founded in 1905 for the revival in the Church of the ministry of healing. Mission work is carried on among the poor of South London and in the East End.

his prayers ; yet when Timothy was ill, he bade him drink no longer water, but use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities. How is it, O Paul, that thou miraculously restorest the sick unbeliever to health, and yet to thy fellow-labourer prescribest only natural remedies like a physician ? Is it not because outward miracles have for their object that souls should be conducted to the inward miracle ? . . . In order for faith to grow, it must be nourished by miracle, as when we plant shrubs we water them until we see that they have taken firm root in the ground. The Church works now in a spiritual manner what it then effected through the Apostles in a bodily manner. When believers who have renounced the language of their former life cause holy truths to issue from their lips, what do they but ' speak with new tongues ' ? When they hear pernicious counsel, but are not carried away to commit evil deeds, do they not ' drink deadly poison, but it does not hurt them ' ? When they see their neighbours weak in righteousness, and give them help and strengthen them by their own example, what do they but ' lay their hand upon the sick that they may recover.' Strive after these miracles of love and piety, which are all the more sure as they are the more hidden."

Furthermore, Mr. Thompson compares with the Gospel narrative of our Lord's giving of sight to the blind the " evidence for a similar cure worked by the Emperor Vespasian."¹ He refers us to Tacitus, *Hist.* iv. 81, Suetonius, *Vespas.* vii. and also to Pliny, *H.N.*, xxviii. 7. We have already had occasion to remark upon Mr. Thompson's capacity for faith when the miracles of the Gospels are not concerned. It is quite possible that his faith here is not wisely

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

placed. Those who do not read Latin easily will find an excellent translation of the passage in question in Church and Brodribb's *History of Tacitus*.¹ Tacitus informs us that a blind man in Alexandria by the advice of the God Serapis requested Vespasian to deign to moisten his cheeks and eyeballs with his spittle; and that another with a diseased hand,² at the counsel of the same divinity, prayed that his hand might feel the impression of Cæsar's foot. Vespasian at first ridiculed and repulsed them, but when they persisted, he consulted the physicians. In the case of the blind man they advised him that "the faculty of sight was not wholly destroyed, and might return," and that in the other case "the hand which had fallen into a diseased condition might be restored if a healing influence were applied. At any rate," they said, "all the glory of a successful remedy would be Cæsar's, while the ridicule of failure would fall upon the sufferers." This argument, so different from the intercessions in the Gospel, persuaded the Emperor, and he did as requested, and it is said with success. At any rate, this is the account of Tacitus, a man whose elevation was "begun by Vespasian, increased by Titus, and still further promoted by Domitian."³ He states that "persons actually present attest both facts, *even now when nothing is to be gained by falsehood*." The implication here surely is that, during Vespasian's life and the lives of his sons, something was to be gained by falsehood, and once invented, the story would continue to be related by those whose sole ambition was to pick up and retail the gossip of the court. We

¹ pp. 188-191.

² According to Suetonius it was a leg: *delibi crure*. Hume says this was "one of the best attested miracles in all profane history."—*Essays* ii., 99.

³ *Hist.*, i., 1.

would also be more convinced if the names were given. The insertion of names, even if fictitious, would be at least an attempt to give a better appearance to the story. Their omission tells against the case.

This vague evidence for a miraculous cure said to have been performed by a scoffing and unwilling emperor, and only when persuaded that the failure of the attempt would redound upon the sufferers—a noble and Christlike attitude—related by a man who owed his position to Vespasian and his sons, and who had an interest therefore in magnifying his imperial masters past and present, is compared by a man, who appeals to common-sense, with the Gospel records of miracles wrought by Christ in a very different attitude and attested by very different evidence.

It is also to be noted that both these cases appear to be founded upon the records in the Gospels of the restoration of the blind man's sight (Mark viii. 22-26) and of the withered hand (Mark iii. 1-5). We are well aware of the hostile bias of both Tacitus and his friend Pliny to the Christian religion. See the passage from Sulpicius Severus which is ascribed to Tacitus by Jacob von Bernays, in which it is related that "Titus was determined that the temple should be destroyed, in order that the Jewish superstition and its off-shoot the Christian might be thoroughly eradicated."¹ We can well imagine that both Pliny and Tacitus would take a special delight in transferring to their own Emperor some of the marvels connected with the hated Christian "superstition." The effect of such a policy would be twofold: it would denude the detested Christianity of its unique glory, and it would array the imperial divinity in attractive and popular colours, in addition

¹ Church and Brodribb, *History of Tacitus*, p. xv.

to winning its favour for their own advancement. It is not at all unlikely that in the year A.D. 70 such Gospel records should be known in Alexandria, in which city there were so many Jews, and doubtless Christians among them, and which is associated in Church history with St. Mark. At all events, it would seem from the story that the men were acquainted with the Gospel of St. Mark, and the story, therefore, may furnish an indirect testimony to that Gospel. It is also probable that this story partly originated in the desire of certain of Vespasian's adherents in Alexandria to show that he, and not the dead Vitellius, was the favourite of Serapis. While it served no moral, it possibly served a political purpose.

The final question to be decided is this: are Pliny and Tacitus sufficiently impartial and trustworthy witnesses, and worthy of credence in this matter without any further evidence than their own statement? Of the two, Pliny's mind appears to us to be the less enlightened according to our standard of thought. After giving an account of Christianity, which he had obtained by torture and persecution, and in the course of which he states that the Christians bound themselves by a sacrament or oath that they would not commit theft, robbery, or adultery, nor break their word nor deny a deposit, crimes only too common among every class in the Roman world, he delivers the profound opinion that the religion which exercised such a holy restraint upon men's lives was a "depraved and extravagant superstition"¹ simply because it refused to give divine honours to a Roman despot and worship the image of himself which that despot had set up, but which it was the interest of Pliny and creatures of his stamp

¹ "Superstitionem pravam immodicam"—Pliny to Trajan, Letter X., 96.

to adore. Is the evidence of such a partizan of the imperial cult, which stood for everything that was immoral, abominable and bestial in the ancient world, to be taken against a religion that has always stood, and then especially, for all that is true, pure and holy?

We have now to consider the evidence of Tacitus. He described Christianity as a "pernicious superstition" ¹ and Christians as "criminals who deserved the very newest forms of punishment." ² Looking through such prejudiced eyes at this case, he is not likely to prove a fair-minded witness. It is surely to be taken into consideration that, after his description of the cure alleged to have been wrought by Vespasian and by the advice of the God Serapis, he proceeds to narrate the legend the Egyptian priests under the Ptolemies had invented of the Greek origin of that deity. The story is full of marvels, visions and absurdities, and Tacitus admits that there are several conflicting accounts, but he leaves us in doubt as to which he wishes us to accept as the true version. The legend of Serapis stands, therefore, on the same level of truth as that of Vespasian's miracle. ³ Both are false or both are true.

The same writer informs us seriously in *Hist.* v. 5, that the Jews worshipped the effigy of an ass which they had erected in their holy place, and a few chapters lower down ⁴ states that when Pompey entered the Temple, "the place stood empty, with no likeness

¹ "Exitiabilis superstitio"—*Annals*, xv., 44.

² "Sontes et exempla novissima meritos."

³ The fact that this story is repeated by Suetonius (*Vespasian*, vii.), a collector of anecdotes and court gossip, rather than a serious writer of history, adds no weight whatever to it. Josephus, who also referred to some such incident (*Ant.*, viii., 2, 5), is always eager to exalt Vespasian, who was kind to him. His statement is therefore valueless.

⁴ *Hist.*, v. 9.

of any divinity within, and there was nothing in the shrine." No wonder Tertullian calls him the "most garrulous of liars."¹ In his account of the Jewish social customs² he mentions it as a grave moral drawback to them that "it is a crime among them to kill any new-born child," whereas the Romans regarded infanticide and the refusal of the father to rear—*tollere*—his child as quite respectable.

Of such a kind is the nature of the evidence for Vespasian's miraculous cure. Can anything be more perverted and distorted in our eyes than the moral judgment of such writers?³ Can it be compared for one moment with the moral judgment and discrimination of the Evangelists and Apostolical writers? That, after all, is the principal question upon which the value of their evidence depends.

NOTE.—The late Dr. Abbott, of Trinity College, Dublin, exposed in *Hermathena* the so-called miracle of the Holy Thorn. See his *Essays*, 183*f*. We would recommend the "common-sense" of that article to the notice of those who compare the miracles of the Roman Church with the miracles of the New Testament.

¹ *Apol.* 16—"mendaciorum loquacissimus." See reference to Christians as *asinarii* in this chapter, and the slander "Deus Christianorum" ΟΝΟΚΟΙΤΗΣ (*ὄνοκοιτης*=lying in an ass's stall).

² *Hist.*, v., 5.

³ Professor Bury says of Tacitus: "Like Livy, he cared little for historical research"—(*History of the Roman Empire*, p. 481); and of Suetonius: "He had good materials at his disposal, but is not critical" (p. 553).

CHAPTER IV

MIRACLE AND CHRISTIANITY

AT the present day there is perhaps more opposition to the miraculous evidence of Christianity than there has been at any other. We are in the very midst of marvels, which would have been considered miraculous a century ago—wireless telegraphy, aeroplanes, radio-activity,¹ and countless other discoveries, and yet men resent the abnormal in the Scriptures. They are hostile to the phenomena of the Gospels because of their very strangeness, and because they are different from previous experience, and do not seem consistent with the principle of the uniformity of nature.

Mr. Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*, pointed out that the attitude of the ordinary educated class towards miracles is "not that of doubt, of hesitation, of discontent with the existing evidence, but rather of absolute, derisive, and even unexamining incredulity." Many, inspired by Matthew Arnold's sweeping statement "Miracles do not happen," affect to regard the Bible as a tissue of improbabilities. Such are sternly admonished by the last President of the British Association that

¹ It is interesting to note that the properties of radium, when discovered, caused quite a flutter in the scientific world. Sir Oliver Lodge wrote in the *Nineteenth Century*, July, 1903: "Let me ask readers to give no ear to those ignorant of the principles of physics who will be sure to urge that the foundations of science are being uprooted, and long-cherished laws shaken. . . . The new information is supplementary and stimulating, not really revolutionary."

“to deny effectively needs much more comprehensive knowledge than to assent;” by the position of Huxley, who wrote, “Denying the possibility of miracles seems to me quite as unjustifiable as speculative atheism;”¹ and by Kant, who conceded the possibility and, under certain circumstances, the utility of miracles. How is this fatal prejudice to be overcome? That it is an irrational prejudice is proved by the unreasoning attitude of many who, like Strauss, simply cut out all the supernatural element from the Gospel—the element to which it owes its permanence and power—and regard the natural alone, on which if it had only depended it had long ago passed into oblivion, as historically true. This prejudice against miracles has biased the criticism of the Scriptures from the very outset.

That such prejudice is often due to a circumscribed experience may be seen from the fact that in other fields of research previous experience has often fostered an unpleasant and absurd attitude to new facts. The discoveries of Galileo, Copernicus, and Harvey were opposed by their contemporaries for no other reason than their strangeness. Lightning-conductors, the electric telegraph, flying machines, etc., occasioned much innocent mirth among the wise when they were first suggested. Every day we are prepared to hear of strange results produced by forces in new combinations and under new conditions. We do not regard such results as violations of law, but as new co-operations of law. Is it improbable that our knowledge of law and its operations may one day be so extended that men will smile at the difficulties the miracles of the Gospel once presented to them, and will acknowledge the truth of Butler’s suggestion that “God’s miraculous interpositions may have been all along by

¹ *Spectator*, February 10th, 1866.

general laws of wisdom" ?¹ It is much, in the meantime, that we have learned (1) that results different from and contrary to all previous human experience may be, and are, brought about by new arrangements and combinations of known forces, and by new forces hitherto undetected, and that there is nothing preternatural in such results ; and (2) that the old definition of a miracle as violation of law must be surrendered as our knowledge of our own limitation and of the capacity of nature makes advance.

Granted the existence of a Divine Will, omnipotent and omnipresent—for that is the postulate of Theism without which we could not attempt to establish the credibility of miracles—why should not the extraordinary manifestations of that Will be wrought by the selection and use of laws of which man knows nothing, and which, if he did know, he could not employ ?² Indeed, as Dr. John Tulloch pointed out, "when we reflect that this Higher Will is everywhere reason and wisdom, it seems a juster, as well as more comprehensive, view to regard it as operating by subordination and evolution rather than by 'interference' or 'violation'."³ The key of these miraculous interventions may, accordingly, be in the astonishing use of natural means, the remarkable development of natural resources and forces by One Who knew them and could employ them.

We cannot even say, realizing, as we have learnt to do, the infinite possibilities of nature, and our own imperfect knowledge of nature and its forces and laws, that it is a thing incredible that God should raise the dead. Even Huxley wrote, "If a dead man did come to life, the fact would be evidence not that any law of nature had been violated,

¹ *Analogy*, ii., 4.

² See Duke of Argyle's *Reign of Law*, p. 16.

³ *Beginning Life*, p. 29.

but that these laws, even when they express the results of a very long and uniform experience, are necessarily based on our incomplete knowledge."¹ In consequence of this extension of our knowledge of natural forces, Christian apologists are often inclined to look upon the miracles of the Gospel as the signs of the working, not of new forces, but of forces newly come into the light, as it were, from the subliminal stage. The late Archbishop Temple went so far as to suggest that "The miraculous healing of the sick may be no miracle in the strictest sense at all. It may be but an instance of the power of mind over body—a power which is undeniably not yet brought within the range of science, and which, nevertheless, may be really within its domain. In other words, what seems to be miraculous, may be simply unusual."² He even ventured to predict that "It is quite possible that our Lord's Resurrection may be found hereafter to be no miracle at all in the scientific sense. It foreshadows and begins the general resurrection; and when that general resurrection comes, we may find that it was, after all, the natural issue of physical laws always at work."³

¹ *Hume*, p. 135. ² *Bampton Lectures*, 1888, pp. 195, 196.

³ Cf. Duke of Argyle in *Reign of Law*, p. 16. After stating his position, which is similar to Temple's on the use of natural laws, he mentions that Lecky (*Rationalism in Europe*, i., ii., 195, note) remarked that he (Argyle) conveyed "the notion of a miracle which would not differ generically from a human act, though it would still be strictly available for evidential purposes." The Duke says: "I am quite satisfied with the definition of the result. Beyond the immediate purposes of benevolence, which were served by almost all the miracles of the New Testament, the only other purpose which is ever assigned to them is an 'evidential purpose'—that is, a purpose that they might serve as signs of the presence of superhuman knowledge, and of the working of superhuman power."

Of course, then, the resurrection of our Lord would cease to be used as miraculous evidence of such a fact, for then it would be no longer needed as a proof of a resurrection. But in the meantime the fact of the resurrection will be an occurrence which no force or combination of forces, physical or psychical, known to man can bring about. Accordingly, even if the resurrection be "after all, but the natural issue of physical laws always at work," the resurrection of our Lord will always be a miraculous evidence of such an event until it takes place. There is no necessity to place any occurrence, however strange and unique, outside the range of natural causation, or to regard it as an exception to the laws of nature, in a word to make it miraculous, when we consider that God Himself pervades all nature, and for Him there is not that distinction of supernatural causation and natural causation which obsesses many minds.¹ If psychical research can discover or demonstrate that our Lord's resurrection was no miracle at all in the scientific sense, that is, in showing that it took place in accordance with natural law, we cannot see, even if we consider the possibility very remote, how it will weaken the position of Christianity. We believe it would, on the contrary, strengthen it, and confirm its testimony of a future life borne under the most trying and faith-crushing circumstances for nearly two thousand years.

Remember the "evidential" nature of miracles. They were primarily wrought to reveal the mind and purpose of God, and for the attainment of moral ends. And if they, in their day, did bear

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, I., cx., 4—"Miraculum est praeter ordinem naturae creatae; Deus igitur cum solus sit non creatura, solus etiam virtute propria miracula facere potest."

witness to the high credentials of the Master, they had for that time the sanction and value of miraculous deeds, "works which none other did." If we lose sight of this high moral purpose of the miracles of the Gospel it is because we have failed to distinguish "signs" from "wonders," and to observe that "wonders" are never mentioned without "signs" in the New Testament.

A scientific writer¹ of our day admits that "in some respects" many of the "so-called miracles" are now "objectively more reasonably probable" than they once were, owing to the progress of science. This statement, he says, is "most obviously applicable to the miracles of healing." "And why? Because in modern medical practice, especially as developed on the Continent, similar occurrences are experienced to-day: for instance, the production by self or other suggestion of wounds analogous to the 'stigmata' and cases of what might appear to be miraculous healing." He proceeds, "Whether this fact, if we assume it to be a fact, is one to be welcomed or otherwise by interpreters of Holy Writ is a question for themselves to answer." Again we repeat that we fail to see that Christianity stands to lose anything by any light that modern science can throw—we do not say upon the mediæval miracles of the Roman Church, which are not binding on the Romans themselves,² but upon the miracles of the New Testament. To establish them on a scientific basis is not to deprive them of spiritual

¹ Sir Oliver Lodge, *Man and the Universe*, p. 71.

² "You might say that the infallible authority was pledged to the truths of the miracles recorded in the Breviary as much as the New Testament is pledged to the miracles of the Gospels. Not in the least. Roman Catholics are free to accept or reject them as they please"—Salmon, *Infallibility of the Church*.

significance, for they were wrought as signs, and were intended to serve as proofs of the Great Worker's Nature, Personality and Mission, and also as symbols of the changes He is able to bring about in the souls of men. It is this connection of word and work, this association of ideas suggested by a word of the Worker, that is really the matter for wonder, and is evidence of supernatural power and wisdom. The object of the Gospel miracles has been attained. They did create faith in the power and knowledge of Christ. They did lead men to a deeper consideration of the relation of His Word and Work to His Personality and Character. They were only used with the strictest economy. Now that they have fulfilled their object ; now that they have led men to the feet of Christ ; now that they have taught men to see the connection between the material and the spiritual, between their bodies and their souls ; now that they have proved to man the existence of a Divine Providence that uses the material for the furtherance of spiritual and moral ends ; now that they have proved stepping-stones to a higher view of nature and of God, they have ceased, because they have played their part in helping to introduce the new teaching and the new life to mankind. They have been veritable signs that pointed man to the Saviour, appropriate vehicles of a Divine revelation. These considerations make a *prima facie* case for the Gospel miracles, and at least demand a careful inquiry into the evidence. But we are not concerned here with the weighing of the evidence for them.

There was surely more evidence than is recorded. The Gospels were not compiled as summaries of evidence for the miraculous birth and resurrection of the Christ. It was the very belief itself in the Divine origin, mission and resurrection

of Christ that gave birth to the Church, whose Book, written for other generations, is the Gospel. The original scribes and editors wrote to give a coherent and reliable account of everything from the beginning, for the advantage of those who believed. They did not compile a story in the interests of their new sect, employing their own imagination when materials failed them, or introducing their own ideas of what was fitting to be done, toning down some passages, heightening others, and generally giving an air of mystery and miracle to the commonplace details of life. If that was the manner in which the Gospels were conceived, if that was the manner in which the Christ of the Gospels was misunderstood, they would have been buried long ago in the lumber-room of a mediæval library, or in the sands of Egypt.

It is possibly a mistake to imagine that Christianity was intended to be a miraculous religion. At the heart of it is a Divine mystery. And that mystery was revealed in an equally mysterious manner. But if that Divine mystery, the Life of the Incarnate Word of God, be proved one day to be the most natural and logical issue of human life indwelt by God; and if that mysterious manner be understood one day as the ordinary manifestation of such a Divine Being, Christianity will not lose its character or its mission. We see that every new beginning of physical and moral life, every new departure that leads to a higher round in the ladder of being, is attended by the appearance of a new force. We have three such departures in the life of animate beings—motion, life, consciousness. Why should not the new beginning of spiritual life, described in the Gospels, be so signalized? But as after every fresh endowment the race moves on in a normal way, not noticing or regarding as unusual

the marvels its new powers have brought into its ken, until it has begun to concentrate its mind on their wonderful intricacies of arrangement, design and provision ; so, after the Pentecostal endowment with the Spirit of the Risen Christ, the Church went on the even tenour of its way, as if aware that it was no spasmodic appearance, but one that was to last for aye, steadily seeking constant guidance and regular control, and continuing " in the breaking of the bread and in prayers " (Acts ii. 42).

How different would be the mental condition of those who lived on miracles, as those early Christians are supposed to have done ! How unsettled, hysterical, highly nervous and unstrung ! Whereas the Christians of the *Acts* are practical, sensible, level-headed men, able to organize both ministerial and social agencies, and to steer a course out of their difficulties. A steadying influence was exercised upon them by their remembrance of their Master's strict régime. He allowed no waste in the matter of the fragments ; He allowed no delay in the loosing of Lazarus ; He allowed no relaxation of the leper's law. He did not usher a reign of chaos and confusion, but of order and contentment, into life. He taught men of the omnipresent, universal, unwearying, omniscient and impartial providence of the Father, and not to be anxious or worried by the cares of the morrow. Was such teaching calculated to unsettle men's minds ? And knowing that His works were chiefly wrought to lead His people to that view of life and to that implicit trust in a ruling and feeling Father, can we believe that Christianity was intended always to be propagated by miracles like the " signs " of the New Testament, such as Gregory the Great seems to ascribe to the mission of Augustine of Canterbury ?

Christianity in this sense is miraculous, that it is filled with the amazing wonder of a love that pierced the shades of death for man, and of a life that was without sin, and that it bears witness to the Incarnation of the Word of God, and to His Resurrection; but it is natural in this sense, that its testimony is in perfect harmony with the character and nature of its Founder. And if it should ever come to pass that the modes of activity He displayed should become familiar to man, they cannot lose their religious significance when treated in connection with Him. An abnormal phenomenon is not in itself a holy thing. It has no moral or spiritual attribute; for it is not a person. It is only, then, in its association with a person that it can be either holy or the reverse. Amazing phenomena cannot give moral sanction to an immoral mission. But when such phenomena were manifested in connection with the holiest, noblest, highest, purest Being who ever trod God's earth, they take on a different character from what they would assume if manifested by any lesser soul. They become part of His mission and an integral portion of His personality for the time being. They become "signs" of a divine holiness and love, of a holiness that would save the body as well as the soul, of a love that would not even spare itself if it could serve others. Here is the contrast between the work of the Saviour and the work of Satan, the powerful agent of evil and hate and lust among men.

The works of the Saviour may be imitated by the power of Satan, but they are always to be distinguished from them as the coin is from the counterfeit. The ring of truth, of holiness, of love is not in them. But even if the work of the Master be imitated by a servant, and not by an enemy, we cannot see how what a servant of the Master

succeeds in doing, by following his Master's method and by being filled with the Master's Spirit, can reflect in any manner upon the work of the Master. We cannot, indeed, say to what extent the spirits of pure and holy persons can acquire supremacy over matter. But no manifestation of their powers could be mistaken for the manifestations of the unique personality of Christ, those deeds of love and mercy and compassion which have so wondrous a charm and are so deeply symbolical of divine truths. "They are, indeed, so essentially a part of the Character depicted in the Gospels, that without them that Character would entirely disappear. They flow naturally from a Person who, despite His obvious humanity, impresses us as being at home in two worlds. Miracles are inwoven in the very fabric of His Personality, so that the attempt to disentangle the thread of His wonderful works would lead to the elimination of His Divinity. The wonderful One could not but act in a wonderful way."¹

Men say, and with reason, that whether miracles happened or not, God could have revealed Himself in perfect manhood without a series of "signs and wonders," just as He makes Himself manifest to His children to-day in the normal workings of natural law, which are full of mystery, and are evidences of marvellous thought and power.

He reveals Himself to us not only in the starry heaven above us, in the world He has built up beneath our feet, but also in the conscience and reason and thoughts of men, and all this in a normal way, constant and continuous, which does not jar upon us unless something uncommon has been done or

¹ Illingworth, *Divine Immanence*, p. 50.

takes place. But for our even, uniform progress we do not need catastrophes, but steady, harmonious guidance. Yet, when we pause to observe and reflect, we find marvel and miracle everywhere; and not least in the various stages of nature, and in the development of its life.

But this is for our general guidance and control, which must be steady and uniform. Life has not always been such, we know. We find many traces of upheavals in the earth's crust and in the ocean depths, of great changes in the surface of the land, climate and other things. In the passing from the inorganic to the organic stage, great variations and developments were witnessed. Then, when life became self-conscious, and the will directed by the reason, and the spirit informed and indwelt by God, we have new stages in the upward progress of existence. Suppose, then, the Father has a new and special revelation of Himself to make, and that He chooses to make it in the Person of His Son, the visible representative of the invisible Father, are we competent judges, *a priori*, before the event, of what such a revelation of God should be like? Are we qualified to state, considering the matter abstractly as philosophers, that it would not be at all necessary, not only for the incidents, details, and features, but also for the whole scheme and method of such a revelation to be other than natural, meaning normal? Should we, who are increasingly made aware of the power of mind over matter, resent such a revelation if it was given with signs and wonders? Should we not rather resent the attitude of those who demand that "theologians will for the future be careful to base the belief in the Divine-human personality of Christ, and His victory over sin and death, on a worthier or at any rate more permanently satisfying foundation than

His willingness and ability to work sensational marvels " ? ¹

There are some who say that they are convinced from other data than the miracles of the Divinity of Christ that they do not need their witness to believe in Him. This, as we have pointed out already, is the very highest form of faith. We can well believe that a "theology which should take an ultimate reliance on miracles and a distrust of our own spiritual insight, as serious principles, would be the helpless prey of the 'lying wonders' foretold in Scripture" (C. J. Shebbeare *op. cit.* p. 15); but we have already seen in Chapter II that it is chiefly because our moral sense and spiritual insight approve of the Gospel phenomena as being suitable to the Lord Himself, to His Character and Personality, to humanity, and as a revelation of the Divine Father to men—that we believe them. The Revelation within confirms the Revelation without, and therefore we accept the latter. While we agree with Ritschl in holding that we can only really understand Christianity through its sacred experiences, we may not follow his example and dispense with objective facts and historical events on the ground that they are connected with theology. We dare not separate the subjective from the objective, *for the result of such separation is a philosophical fiasco*. The disciples of the Ritschlian school are not seriously disturbed in mind by historical and scientific objections urged against the Virgin Birth, the Empty Tomb, and the Ascension, for they are convinced on other grounds that Christ has the value of God for them; and that is sufficient.

When we ask what these grounds are, we learn that it is as the bringer of the complete revelation

¹ A correspondent in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, Sept., 1913.

of grace and truth, and as the Founder of the supermundane Kingdom of God that they regard Him as Divine. That is purely His religious value for them. If miracles are to be believed, it must be in consequence of a previous faith in the supreme spiritual personality of Christ. We accept this statement in a great measure; but when we have removed the veil of words, we find that He is simply regarded by this school as an exceptional Man who arrived at a standard not hitherto attained, yet within the reach of man.¹ The medium of a divine revelation united by will, not by nature, with the Father, and perfectly human, is the Christ of this school which scorns the Homousion, with all other dogma, as a product of Greek metaphysics on the soil of the Gospel. Can such a Christ bear on His soul the cross of the world and redeem by His Spirit the world from sin? The Ritschlians must have felt the impossibility, for their theory of Atonement,² sacrifice and forgiveness lacks all reality.

Equally unsatisfactory is the attitude of this school to the miracles of the Gospel. They are to be regarded, according to Ritschl, not from a scientific point of view, but from a religious point only. Miracle for their school is a "religious" not a "scientific" notion, and is not to be considered as contravening natural law.³ The whole question of the relation of Christ to that world-order, which miracles are understood to contravene,

¹ See Edghill, *Faith and Fact*, p. 186, *et seq.*; and Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology*, p. 262, *et seq.*

² The only Atonement they recognized was the removal of man's distrust of God, which barred the way to free and full communion, by the death of Christ, which re-established man's confidence in God. *Kipper* for them meant the protective covering, not of the sinfulness, but of the creatureliness of man (R. and V., 204).

³ Ritschl, *Unterricht*, p. 14.

is inadequately treated. We cannot regard them as true for religion, but as untrue for science and history. According to Harnack, "the historian cannot regard a miracle as a sure historical event,"¹ and "it is not miracles that matter."² According to Hermann the discussion of the trustworthiness of Gospel narratives of miracles is perfectly indifferent for theology in our day,³ and "if the miracles of Christ had never taken place, or if we knew nothing of them, we should still have sufficient hold of the Word."⁴ Another writer⁵ thinks that if a man has the faith in the uniqueness and influence of Christ's personality, which the faith in the miracles expresses, he should not be pressed as to his belief in the miracles. The miracles are not allowed as evidence. No doctrine is to be founded on them.

If the Resurrection is believed, it is not because of the empty tomb, which is rejected, but because of the conviction of Christ's abiding life, based on their estimate of His religious worth, "the impression of Christ's person."⁶ It is on this ground which is purely subjective, and not on the historically attested fact, that they believe in the "re-awakening of Christ by the power of God,"⁷ "awakened from death to the heavenly life with God."⁸ According to Hermann,⁹ in Christianity nothing more is necessary than to proclaim Christ. Such stories as His Divine Sonship, the Virgin Birth, His miraculous works, His Resurrection, His Ascension and present power, positively hinder faith.

¹ *Dogmengeschichte*, E. T., i., 59.

² *What is Christianity?* p. 31. ³ *Die Religion*, p. 383.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184. ⁵ Sell, in *Zeitschrift*, 1892.

⁶ Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, E. T., i., 65.

⁷ Ritschl, *Unterricht*, p. 21.

⁸ Wendt, *Lehre Jesu*, ii., 543. ⁹ *Op. cit.*, 63.

And Harnack, who affirmed that faith had only to do with the conviction that Jesus is the living Lord, asserted that "history gives not the least cause for the assumption that Jesus did not continue in the grave."¹ Accordingly, the disciples of this school,² as a rule, do not see any evidence for the Divinity of Christ in the Virgin Birth or Resurrection, but base their belief in Christ on the ground of "the worth of His person" (Ritschl) and "the impression of His spiritual greatness and goodness" (Hermann).

The Godhead of Christ is consequently for them a "thought of faith," a mere judgment of value, without any objective reality. It is only fair to admit that this school have done well in insisting on the value of Christian experience and its judgments. It is only the soul that bows in homage to Christ that can understand His Godhead. Intellectual assent to doctrine is less effective and forceful than the devotion of the heart. At the same time there can be no devotion without some reality to cling to. It is here that Ritschlianism fails. Of this Ritschl seemed to be conscious when he wrote, "Of a communion with the exalted Christ there can be no mention." Surely this is not the Christ we have learned to love and adore—this Christ with whom we may not hold communion, to Whom we may not pray, Who was not without beginning of days, Who was not the Word made flesh, the Virgin-born Son of God, Who rose from the tomb, to Whose influence after His Ascension the early Church of the *Acts* bears witness, to Whom His Church has always prayed, and with Whom she ever desires to hold solemn and sweet communion.

¹ *Op. cit.*, i., 87.

² Kaftan, Häring and Kähler are notable exceptions.

Why do the members of that school appear to follow the phantom rather than the reality, the shadow rather than the substance? Because on the one hand they made the unphilosophical assumption that there is no world-order but the physical, no causation but that of which science takes cognizance,¹ and on the other, because they have taken out of the living organic continuum of Christian experience certain elements, even the historic facts on which our faith was founded, and around which that experience grew up. The result, accordingly, is lacking in life and reality. But the whole system is dangerously seductive because it offers many a way for evading the dilemma between Gospel miracle and natural law, and appeals to many in our day who would like to see theology made independent of miracles and metaphysics.

During the course of the free inquiry which is being diligently pursued in every branch of study we cannot hope that the precious beliefs and cherished ideas of the Christian Church will escape severe scrutiny. Much may have to be discarded, much that has been endeared to our hearts by Christian sentiment and an almost sacred tradition. But we may rest assured that the broad facts on which our faith has been built and our Church has been founded will never be surrendered nor allowed to be deprived of historical reality. Nor will His Church permit an interpretation to be put upon the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ which would

¹ This statement is borne out by the fact that Kaftan, Häring and Kähler, and other members of this school, who believe that the "laws of nature" are only empirical generalizations, and have no necessity about them which excludes belief in miracle, also believe in a literal Resurrection.

empty them of all meaning, and while doubtless intended to impress its soul utterly fails to satisfy its reason.¹

¹ A sympathetic account of the subjectivism of Ritschlianism is given by Rev. C. J. Shebbeare in *Religion in an Age of Doubt* (pp. 120-140). On the other hand, others have identified Ritschlianism with Pragmatism (in the philosophical sphere), which finds the essence of truth in value, and which applies as a universal test the question, "Does it work?" Truth, according to Prof. James (*Pragmatism*, p. 77) "is what it would be better for us to believe." "An idea is true so long as we believe it is profitable for our lives" (p. 75). Ritschlianism seems to be open to the charge of having, like Pragmatism in philosophy, in religion substituted judgments of value for judgments of fact. It maintains that there is no such thing as a "disinterested knowledge of God," and regards what is of supreme value as having absolute truth. Pragmatism means the shedding of the valueless, the non-survival of the unfit. The name was invented by a Mr. C. S. Pierce in the *Popular Science* monthly (January, 1878), for a rough and ready test of the truth or value of a thing, on the principle that a thing that is true *works* and can be applied, and that the truth must emerge from the ordeal of experience. (See Canon McClure's *Modern Substitutes*, p. 189 f.)

CHAPTER V

THE SIGNS OF CHRIST

THE characteristic name for the Gospel miracle is "sign." As "sign" it is understood to have a purpose, and must, therefore, be taken in connection with that purpose in order to be considered philosophically. It cannot be viewed by itself, separated from its setting and the circumstances under which it was wrought, and be photographed, as it were, by itself. The sensational marvels of mountebanks and sorcerers are to be so considered, because they have no ulterior purpose than imposition. But the Gospel miracles fulfil the ulterior purpose of instruction. Their very setting is suggestive and illuminative. For instance, in the miracle of the restoration of sight, the restoration of sight at the particular moment when the command was given—which showed that it was no casual coincidence—constituted an important element in the miracle, adapting it for evidence of something or someone. There is here a manifestation of purpose. Purpose being inseparable from Will and Mind, we are brought into contact, therefore, in the Gospel miracle or sign with a Will and a Mind which apparently are far superior to the human. As signs, such miracles point beyond themselves. They are indications of some ulterior end, which must be moral, if not spiritual, as the miracles are, with one or two exceptions, instances of ameliorative goodness. Their value, accordingly, is not altogether intrinsic; does not lie altogether in themselves, however useful and beneficial they may have been. The miracles of healing, for example, served

a higher purpose than the actual restoration of health. That was a transitory and local effect. It could never give them a perennial significance.

It could never make us interested in them, or edified by them. "The value of a record of miracles to us lies almost wholly in their significance."¹

But what is it that miracles signify? Surely some truth about the relation of God to human life and the purposes He intends to work out in human life, something more than our natural light can teach us. But if miracles are regarded by us as signs of such truths, we must assume (1) that God intended to reveal His purpose and will to men; and (2) that he deliberately used miracles for this end. Now, in the first place, granted the existence of Deity—which we may infer from the evidence of law and design without, and the consciousness of a moral law within—it would be more credible that He should reveal His purpose to men in some special way than not, especially when such a revelation is felt by man to be necessary to his present and future safety, happiness, holiness, and well-being. It would be also more credible that He Who is man's Lord and God, his Maker and Governor, Who has given man a thirst for more knowledge of God, should manifest Himself to him in some special way and satisfy the thirst He has Himself created, than that He should forbear to do so. Suppose all this were granted, would miracles be means so adapted to this very purpose of revelation that it would be credible that they were so employed—*i.e.*, as vehicles of revelation?

Revelation itself, if it be more than the normal illumination and direction of the soul and conscience of man, implies a special providence—something

¹ Warrington, *Can we believe in Miracles?* p. 169.

different from the normal mental uniformity; in short, "a mental miracle." Accordingly, as revelation can only be made by a miracle, as far as we know, miracles are the only possible means of revelation. That is, if God would make known certain truths, such as the Incarnation, the Holy Trinity, the Resurrection, which we could not deduce from the ordinary course of nature, it must be by employing means that are not ordinary. But this is alleged to interrupt the uniform course of nature, and to imply a changeableness and lack of omniscience on the part of God, whereas His omniscience and immutability of character are reflected on the face of nature. But what if God had made previous preparation for such apparent deviations? Suppose that they were specially intended to meet certain foreseen crises in the world's history, such deviations would not prove imperfection in the work. Suppose a clock¹ that strikes the hours has been so arranged that at the end of every century it strikes the years that had passed. The apparent deviation from its normal course would not argue any imperfection in the inner works of the clock. The analogy I admit is not altogether apt, as the recurrences of this set of phenomena are periodic and the occurrence of the other is unique; but it shows that deviation, even if periodic, from uniform rule or order can be consistent with a special pre-arrangement which, in the case of miracle, would be a special providence.

Scripture certainly represents the Incarnation of Christ and the events of His life as part of the Divine scheme foreordained before the foundation of the world, and foretold by prophecy—in itself a

¹ See article, *Miracles*, by Bishop Bernard, Hastings's *Dictionary*, iii, 382.

miraculous occurrence. Could not some other provision have been made for such crises by some other modification of the original course of nature? people who will accept anything rather than miracle ask. But what is a miracle but such a modification? Clearly that which restores a broken or interrupted order must be something in the manner of an intervention which will be different both from that which precedes and that which follows. And the Gospel miracles were clearly intended to restore a broken order.

It is quite apparent that the moral order of human life has been broken by the appearance of sin—the great ἀνομία and anomaly. This has caused an interruption of the Divine order which surely should be made good. At least it is reasonable to expect that it should. And such restoration of law involves some new appearance or new creation or new thing different from anything preceding or following. “The view of the world as disordered by sin, and crying out for redemption, will make it intelligible that ‘miracles’ should appear, *not as violating law, but as a necessary element in its restoration as well as its completer exhibition*; contrary not to the fundamental order of the Divine working, but only to a superficial or mechanical view of it, or to a view which sin has distorted or preoccupation with physical science has unduly narrowed.”¹

Such miracles, which are not violations of law, but are in strict accordance with the general law of Divine wisdom and goodness, are not inconsistent with the Divine character that is revealed in nature, where there is no opposition to His will. For they show how the mind of Deity prepares beforehand to counteract the results of the evil thoughts of

¹ Bishop Gore, Preface to *Lux Mundi*; the italics are ours.

man in the moral order, which is higher than the natural, because there the free-will of God encounters the free-will of man, which does not always move on the same lines with His. How very appropriately do the miracles of our Lord shadow forth the restoration of humanity to the higher levels of spiritual life and thought from which sin had cast it down. This is the reason why they are looked upon as "signs," acted parables of the great things God has to give and the deep things God has to reveal to man. As "signs" the miracles pointed to the Divine Messenger, His authority and character; but they were also significant of the message and Gospel He brought to men.

In the first place the miracles of the Gospel were for the purposes of revelation, "arresting attention on the Agent, accrediting Him as God's Messenger, singling Him out from other men, and proving Him to be in possession of credentials deserving serious consideration."¹ Reference has already been made to the Duke of Argyle's statement regarding their evidential value. If we assume that the universe is under the control of an Almighty Spirit Who is also All-good—and we must, at least, be allowed this—would it not be more natural for Him to reveal Himself in ways calculated to arrest the attention of men and direct their thoughts to the great moral and spiritual purposes of life than not to do so? The idea and fact of God's moral government of the world could not be established without some such kind of intervention. And when we have grounds for believing that such interventions were not intended to be looked upon as sensational marvels, but were made by the special agency of God for the attainment of moral ends—i.e., in

¹ Schleiermacher, *Das Leben Jesu*, p. 239.

order to reveal His will and purpose to men—the perfect harmony of the motive and the deed becomes apparent to us, the philosophy of miracle as a rational system is established. “There is a law of wisdom,” to use Butler’s¹ phrase, “manifest in deeds wrought for a worthy and noble end, and in accordance with a wise and beneficent plan.” This feature of the Gospel miracles distinguishes them—the signs of God’s will and government—from the mediæval miracles which were calculated to play upon the feelings of ignorant people.

In the second place, the miracles of Christ were intended to be symbolical of His power over the life of man, to be signs of the spiritual processes He could set in motion within their souls. They were not only manifestations of power, but of a holy power; not only of wisdom, but of a loving wisdom. They are in keeping with His Divine character in relieving misery and restoring those injured morally and physically. Our Lord’s curative power in the moral sphere was intended to be inferred from the cures He wrought in the physical realm. His treatment of disease was intended to be typical of His dealing with sin. His miracles were object-lessons which illustrated spiritual truths, tokens of the tremendous personal influence that emanated from the Lord of spiritual life upon the lives of men, saving, purifying, and regenerating them. In them all we are allowed to see the connection between the Christ and the Eternal Father—the Source and Fountain of His Divine energy. His restoration of the penitent sinner was in a manner a spiritual resurrection, answering in the moral sphere to the raising of the dead in the physical. Both would be the results of contact with

¹ *Analogy*, ii., 4.

the Divine effluence of life and strength—"the natural outflow of the Divine fulness that was in Him."

Of these miracles of our Lord it can be truly said that the miracles prove the doctrine and the doctrine proves the miracles.¹ The "signs" were worthy of Him Who wrought them; and His character and the truths He taught were worthy of being expressed in the "signs." They are distinct from all miracles that have ever been wrought, in this (1) that they have a spiritual lesson to convey to mankind, a revelation to make of new aspects of the Father's love and character, and (2) that they were deeds which, if we had no right to expect, we cannot but approve as worthy of the Divine mind. How few miracles of any other age or locality can be said to be worthy of God! How few can be said to have a high moral and spiritual purpose! When Matthew Arnold spoke sarcastically of the turning of a pen into a pen-wiper in connection with miracles, he must have been purblind to the meaning of the signs of Christ, which were not performed to excite vulgar astonishment or to satisfy vulgar curiosity, but to represent Divine truths to the minds of men. Such truths commend themselves to our conscience and soul. They bear the Divine stamp and signature, and are worthily symbolized in the "signs" of Christ. Accordingly, they were appreciated by those who understood with their heart as well as

¹ "Les miracles discernent la doctrine et la doctrine discerne les miracles"—Pascal, *Des Miracles*. The blasting of the fig-tree is a parable that unfruitfulness is one's own destruction, not a miracle of destruction. It is not incredible that in this, and also in the case of the destruction of the swine of Gadara, which suggests that unlawfulness leads to ruin, parables have hardened into miracles. At all events, the parabolic element in both appeals to us, and this justifies our regarding them as "signs."

beheld with their eyes. While we have the word of the Master Himself to assure us that there were some—the careless brothers of Dives—who “would not have been persuaded though one rose from the dead,” these miracles were calculated to make men believe in the Divine presence, and turn in the hour of need and trial for spiritual help and guidance, light and strength, to their Spiritual Lord and Master.

Signs like these cannot but have had a Divine source. They reveal the mind and heart of the Father and His Christ. They have a message for all time and for all men. In the “signs” of Christ we have sacraments of His abiding presence, His comfortable thoughts, His Divine love. As Ruskin regarded infinity as the type of the Divine incomprehensibility, unity as the type of the Divine comprehensiveness, repose as the type of the Divine permanence, symmetry as the type of the Divine justice, purity as the type of the Divine energy, and moderation as the type of government by law, we see in the “signs” of Christ sacraments of His love and His power, suitable works of Him Who declares His Almighty power chiefly by showing mercy and pity. They are allegorical deeds, as it were, the hieroglyphics of the faith, the images of those invisible miracles which God wills to accomplish in our hearts if we will allow Him.

Those “signs” of Christ have a perennial freshness and value. They are especially to be remembered in this generation, which is gradually losing its sense of the Divine Fatherhood, and of the near presence and beneficent working of the Divine Spirit, doubtless as the result of its emphasizing the metaphysical attributes of immanence and transcendence. The modern thought of God is gaining much in complexity, but is losing much in simplicity. The Fatherly tenderness and sweetness

—which were recovered for us by the Robertsons, Maurices and Kingsleys of mid-Victorian England—are being lost sight of in the contemplation of the “infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed.”¹ As Bishop Ryle well said in a recent sermon”:² “The idea of the Divine Fatherhood is overwhelmed in the endeavour to conceive of a Creator-Mind in terms of time not to be measured by myriads of millions of years, or in terms of space in the presence of the dust-storms of solar systems passing in their swift but orderly procession along their appointed tracks in the illimitable void.”

The progress of knowledge seems to reveal but greater gloom, and fence off the Divine by higher barriers from human life, as we seek to penetrate into the recesses of His activity and His being. This is a set-back to serious minds. The Divine has become less personal as the wonderful history of the ethnic beliefs is unrolled before us, and the records of the rude and weird attempts of men to conceive of and to placate Deity, and to organize a social life and a moral system, are laid before us. The vastness, the incomprehensibility, the infinitude and unchanging nature of the Divine energy crowd out the simple and comforting thoughts of a Father’s providential care and love. Well for us, then, to have the Gospel records to fall back upon, records of a love and tenderness, a forethought and a power, that were revealed in work as well as in word. As

¹ According to Dr. C. W. Eliot, President Emeritus of Harvard, “the Creator is for modern men a sleepless, active energy and will, which yesterday, to-day and forever actuates all things, as the human spirit actuates its own body, so small and so inconceivably complex. He now appears as incessant workman, as universal servant, as tireless, omniscient energizer”—(*Twentieth Century Christianity*).

² Preached in Great St. Mary’s, Cambridge, October, 1913.

we read, mark, and inwardly digest the Gospels, the dimmed outlines of the Divine Fatherhood of God and the no less Divine Brotherhood of Christ take shape again—firm, clear, and straight, to serve humanity as beacons of light in the pilgrimage of life. Within that circle of Divine light there is not a single spiritual need that may not be satisfied ; not a single problem of moral life that may not be solved, whereof, indeed, the Word of God has given us assurance by many signs, signs of a Father's care and love, a Son's sacrifice and loyalty, a Divine Spirit's sweetness and light. The signs of Christ illuminate the truths of our religion ; they reveal the Trinity in Unity ; they bring us near to the Father's heart ; they lead us to the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls ; they lift up our hearts to the great Spirit Who is One with both, and Who makes us one with Them and one with each other. But, above all things, they illustrate the invisible workings of the Divine energy and the Divine economy of the Divine resources ; as well as the purifying, transforming, illuminating, and regenerating influence of the Divine Presence.

In the words of Ruskin, "And so among the children of God, while there is always that fearful and bowed apprehension of His Majesty, and that sacred dread of all offence to Him which is called the Fear of God, yet of real and essential fear there is not any, but clinging of confidence to Him as their Rock, Fortress, and Deliverer, and perfect love and casting out of fear ; so that it is not possible that, while the mind is rightly bent on Him, there should be dread of anything either earthly or supernatural ; and the more dreadful seems the height of His Majesty, the less fear they feel that dwell in the shadow of it."¹

¹ *Modern Painters*, i., 134.

Is not our contention established (1) that these signs prove that the truth revealed and the Person revealed is of God ; and (2) that the doctrine proves that the signs are suitable expressions of the Divine mind and heart, appropriate manifestations of the Divine will and purpose to disenthral, redeem and regenerate a sin-enslaved and sin-enfeebled race of men ?

Accordingly, the Gospel "signs" are suitable vehicles of the Gospel revelation. Here the Divine wisdom is apparent in the selection of suitable media. The Gospel of grace is not introduced by any sort of miracle, but only by a "sign" of grace ; the Gospel of redemption is not proclaimed by any miracle, but only by a "sign" of redemption ; the Gospel of regeneration is not announced by any miracle, but only by a "sign" of a new birth. The "signs" have a purpose, and the purpose of the "signs" is the purpose of the Kingdom of Heaven. This adds, surely, to their probability.

We may not denude the Christ of His "signs." In other words, we cannot conceive a non-miraculous Christ. An attempt to eliminate the "signs" of the Gospel from the Gospel would be to unravel the whole texture. Nothing coherent or intelligible would remain. Narratives containing miracles can be cut out from the histories of Greece and Rome and from the numerous "lives" of the saints without loss—nay, with much advantage to the history—but not so with the Gospels. After removing all that is not supported by the three Synoptic Gospels from the record, there remains a Gospel that is nothing if not miraculous. As the author of *Ecce Homo* said, "Miracles play so important a part in Christ's scheme, that any theory which would represent them as due entirely to the imagination of His followers, or of a later age, destroys the credibility of the

documents, not partially, but wholly, and leaves Christ a personage as mythical as Hercules."¹

People are not bound to accept any special explanation of these "signs," but however they are explained, the fact remains that they are still "signs," inseparable from the Person of Christ. It was His Mission to reveal the Fatherhood to men both by works and by words. His work cannot be limited to His word, as certain would have us do; nor may our interest find its centre in His word rather than in His person. By the prologue of the Fourth Gospel the Divine Personality of Jesus is introduced to us before we find any allusion to His works, which are then represented to the faithful observer as Sacraments of a Divine Life among men, revelations of a Divine Love in action, evidences of a Divine Power at work, symbols of spiritual processes, and therefore *σημεῖα*, signs. But to the Divine Worker Himself these are the material outcome of His being, that which He wrought, the outward expression of His inner life, and therefore His *ἔργα*, His works. What were "signs" to others were "works" to Him.

Of the supernatural Life described in that prologue, the "signs" of the Gospel are but passing episodes, fleeting flashes, significant phenomena of a unique Personality. The standpoint of the Fourth Gospel is distinct from the Synoptists in nothing more than this, that whereas in the latter the miracles are put forward as the credentials of His mission and the arguments of a faith, in the former the primary motive of faith is the appeal He makes to our hearts and consciences.² The

¹ p. 41; quoted by Bishop of Ossory, Article, *Miracles*, iii., Hastings's *Dictionary*, p. 390.

² Ritschlianism, which regards the primary appeal of Christianity as an appeal to the individual conscience, and

living Christ is thus the principal proof—the chief “sign” of His religion. As He signified His nature in His works, His works are the signs of His nature, stamping His utterances with the seal of divinity and truth. And His Personality was manifested in and through both His words and His works, which are so many tokens and sacraments of His power, His wisdom, and His love, so that in a wonderful way word answers to work, and work corresponds to word in the economy of the Incarnate Life.¹ To rend them asunder is to rend in twain a garment “without seam, woven from the top throughout.”

condemns orthodox theology for resting its case exclusively on the evidence of historical events, cannot find fault with us for resting our case upon such internal proofs.

¹ See *A Fresh Study of the Fourth Gospel* (S.P.C.K.), p. 66., by the present writer.

CHAPTER VI

UNIFORMITY AND THE INCARNATION

It is not in this age alone that doubts have perplexed the Christian mind ; but ever since the first century other interpretations and theories have sought to keep pace with the Church's view. Every age has its own problems. Miracle, the Gospel Miracle, seems to be the special problem of this, although the opposition to miracles is as old as the Church. The age is obsessed with the uniformity of nature or the reign of law. "Uniformity," a scientific writer¹ says, "is always difficult to grasp, our senses were not made for it, and yet it is characteristic of everything that is most efficient." Yet surely we become aware of its advantage when the change comes, and even if we be more accustomed to, more responsive to change, yet stability and steadiness appeals to us more. People like to have a settled home, settled habits, and to be "settled" in life. The breaking up of these by death or departure or any other of the vicissitudes or evils of life leads to great sorrow, and teaches them to prize more than ever that uniformity of life and character which we attribute to the Eternal, "Who was, and is, and is to be," and to Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." Uniformity itself is quite consistent, then, with Divine guidance.

This sense of or feeling for uniformity is manifested in many ways, not least in men's opposition to every arbitrary and special intervention which tends to interrupt the even tenor of life, the placid course of nature. For such, a non-miraculous Christianity

¹ Sir Oliver Lodge, *loc. cit.*, p. 76.

would be most welcome. Could Christianity be stripped of its miracles, signs, and wonders, it would be quite acceptable to them, as it is in the forms of Ritschlianism and Modernism. Attempts to represent the miracles of our Lord as being purely instances of physical or psychical law, and calling for no other Divine intervention than is involved in answer to prayer, or is implied in the conviction of men—an ordinary element of religious experience—that outward events have been made to suit their circumstances, will be hailed by them as a new Gospel. Especially will they rejoice if the works, that have in the Gospel and the Church been regarded as signs of a Divine Origin, Mission and Power, can be proved to be but the natural and normal workings of our Lord's manhood, wrought wholly and solely within the sphere of His perfect human nature, or on the principle that wherever He seemed to surpass man, it was due to His superabundant manhood.

Such are slaves to the reign of law, the uniformity of nature. But its claims have not been strengthened by recent scientific utterances. Science has learnt the limitation of its own powers, assertions, and findings. Its laws are no longer like those of the Medes and Persians. They are not always obeyed, and do not always hold true. This has been confessed openly by modern teachers of science. On the other hand, the complete uniformity of nature is a thing impossible to detect. It is something of a "bogey." No thing in nature is exactly like another. In fact, the cosmos and its life are made up of the reconciliation of opposites in elements and forces. Our senses were made for the observation of differences. The principle of uniformity makes its appeal in a general and indefinite way to man. Again, the uniformity of nature is an equally impossible thing to establish. It was on these

lines that Mozley¹ defended miracle. For miracles cannot be in contradiction to reason when they do not conflict with our reason but only with our expectation. Induction can supply man with probabilities which are indeed, as Butler said, the guide of life, but not with a universal proposition, such as, "No man hath ascended up to heaven." That which does resist the miraculous, he points out, is the *unscientific* part of induction, or the instinctive generalization upon facts.² The inductive principle being "that act of the mind by which, when the philosopher has ascertained by discovery a particular fact in nature, and its recurrence in the same connection within his own observation, he forthwith infers that this fact will universally take place, or converts it into a law," is after all the result of an unreasoning instinct. It is this unreasoning instinct; this unscientific principle, which is simply the "mechanical expectation of the likeness of the unknown to the known," that is opposed to miracle. For this instinct is the only foundation for our belief in the uniformity of the order of nature. It was on the same principle that the President of the British Association said this year :³ "Science should not deal in negations ; it is strong in affirmations, but nothing based on abstractions ought to presume to deny outside its own region."

At the same time this argument of Mozley's⁴ is to be sparingly used. It amounts to this, that the belief in the fixity of nature and the constancy of its law is not founded upon reason, and therefore cannot be urged to establish the irrationality of miracle. For if that argument cuts away the foundation beneath our opponent's feet, it also

¹ *Miracles*, p. 59, *et seq.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 56. ³ 1913.

⁴ See the discussion in *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, c. ii.—A. B. Bruce.

cuts away that beneath our own. A suspicion, moreover, attaches to this argument against the constancy of nature as used by Hume. If there is no regular and uniform order, there can be no exception to it, and consequently no miracle. The term supernatural, too, would lose all meaning unless there were a natural order. That order is necessary, to a certain extent, to miracle ; that it is also fatal to miracle the author of *Supernatural Religion* affirms, but we deny. Dr. Mozley regarded the coincidence between word and work, the prophetic principle in the occurrence as its miraculous element. But if there be no fixed order, such a coincidence may be resolvable into a fortuitous event. In spite of the singularity of his attempt, Dr. Mozley has demonstrated the logical difficulty and inconsistency of the position of our opponents who appeal to experience and to uniformity against what is inexplicable by the former and is an acknowledged exception to the latter. But in doing this he sacrifices the real significance of the miracle. The same result follows the attempt of others to posit some "higher law," an "unknown law," or some equally illusive and indeterminate law, according to which miracles take place and are harmonized with natural law. This would supply us with a law of miracles, which would no longer be singular or unique events, but constantly recurring ones.

Another suggestion that has been made in order to bring these occurrences into line with natural law is to regard them as the result of certain natural laws with which we are still imperfectly acquainted. This is applied especially to the miracles of healing. As Matthew Arnold wrote, "Certainly it is due to this (the connection between moral fault and disease) very much more than we commonly think, and the more it is due to this, the more do moral

therapeutics rise in possibility and importance.”¹ This would assign the miraculous element in our Lord’s works either to His superior knowledge of natural laws or to His remarkable psychological control over men’s minds, in a word, to His moral therapeutics, in which others might attain an equal prominence. According to this view, the miracles of Jesus would be only relatively miraculous, miraculous only according to the standpoint and proficiency of His times, but no longer so to modern men of science who understand these things better. There is a certain analogy, indeed, between the processes of certain miracles and the ordinary processes of nature. But it is not to be pressed, and is deceptive. The attempt to trace natural law in the spiritual world has failed to naturalize the miraculous, if that was its object, chiefly because the spiritual order is spiritually developed. The former is the sphere of necessity, the latter of freedom. In the former, the cast-iron law of cause and effect prevails; in the latter the human personality is developed on lines of free agency and individual responsibility. Even if our will must express itself according to the laws of nature, it is amenable to the law of moral duty—a moral “must,” Kant’s “Imperative,” which at times compels a man to defy nature, and fills him with remorse if he disobeys it. The law of the survival of the fittest gives place to a higher law, the revival of the best.

At the same time we must recognize the fact that there is the same Author of both worlds. Even if these do not represent two sides of a shield, the one facing us and the other facing God, the outside and the inside respectively, for that would rob the spiritual order of its distinctive character of freedom from natural law, they are both under the

¹ *Literature and Dogma*, pp. 143, 144.

governance of Him Who has impressed upon all His creation the law of the supremacy of mind over matter. This introduces a fresh consideration, the teleological, which is quite distinct from the physical and the moral. The law of one's end in this case is the "One far-off Divine Event." It is to realize that end that the various means employed to carry out secondary purposes are indirectly directed. It is that end that stamps the notion of unity upon the totality of existing things in all the spheres of being—the Universe.

Unity is a higher conception of nature than uniformity. When we speak of the Universe we have the idea of an harmonious totality in which the parts are related to the whole and the whole to the parts. When we speak of the organic unity of man, we are using a mystical expression which stands for a oneness of purpose, a solidarity of life, a combination of interests, a confederation of persons, and a correlation of duties which the word uniformity does not suggest at all. Where do we get the idea of unity? From without? Nay, from within. It is we ourselves, as we look out upon the world, who unconsciously unify our own various impressions, reflections and hopes, into *one* connected experience. A great work of arrangement is carried on by our *ego*. Of this we are but dimly aware. It is a work which only a mind can perform. The effect is an ordered, a beautiful system, not a mechanical but a spiritual result. This fact that we build up our experience, create our own worlds, the inner and the outer, would be a thing impossible for us, unless the elements of our experience, which are presented to or are perceived by us in an incoherent, disconnected manner, the material we work upon and work out, themselves constituted an orderly system of things apart from us. This is what we find. Outside us the world is ruled and regulated,

its various parts are grouped and arranged with reference to each other and to some central thing or being. There is system, design, purpose, idea everywhere, especially in human life. The unity without is, accordingly, analogous to the unity within. The unity and order of our experience is due to our own unifying and systematizing mind. The unity and order without must, then, be due to a similar unifying and systematizing Mind. And this implies supremacy and control. The whole Universe is, accordingly, a manifestation of the Spirit's power and supremacy over matter. We have here room for spiritual guidance, for answers to prayer, for the miracles of Christ, even in the presence of uniform law. For we have seen that the whole consists not of matter alone, nor of Spirit alone, but of both Spirit and matter, the Spirit controlling the matter. The processes of nature may surely be modified by the indwelling and all-pervading Spirit, Who has given unity and order to the Cosmos, and Who can restore that unity and order, for Its own spiritual ends.

Again, while there are millions of secondary or subsidiary causes, spirit alone is a true cause. The only true primary cause we really know is our own *ego*. We are self-determined beings. We can initiate our own movements ; form our own plans ; follow our own purposes. Such a cause within our own experience leads us to infer that there must be a similar cause without us, and that the real true primary cause of the totality of things, including our own selves, is spiritual. Our own consciousness that we are not altogether machines inclines us to believe that the Force that controls the Universe is not entirely mechanical. Physical causes such as Hume was occupied with, according to Malebranche, are not true causes ; " they are but occasional causes, which are only put into action by the

force and efficacy of the will of God.”¹ These causes, then, being set agoing by the Divine Spirit that energizes in and through all things, Who, as St. Paul pointed out, puts in motion the energy of our own wills,² are only the transmitters of causation, the media through which the Divine Cause operates. Causation implies unity, the constant connection of everything with the primal cause, Divine Spirit.

Unity and causation belong essentially to the moral, the spiritual sphere. There they are found, in the will that can initiate movement, of its own inner nature without external compulsion; in the mind that can control and arrange its own inner experience; and in the soul that can respond to the authority of a moral law which it alone can impose upon itself. Unity and causation are manifestations of the Spirit interpreting and acting, and displaying Its supremacy. In our own moral and spiritual experience—which the physical world affects but little—we often find that the material must give way to the moral, and that the only real authority in our life is exercised by the conscience, which is both moral and spiritual, spiritual in its essence, moral in its manifestations. Is it impossible, then, to believe that the Spirit can not only make room for Its own modifications and interventions, but also can call new forces into play or reveal them in a new way, as a man does to attain moral and spiritual ends, and that It is supreme in the Universe as the source of unity, causation and authority?

Does not all this place the possibility and probability, the idea and fact, of miracle upon a surer basis? For we can never say what forces operated, and under what conditions, at any special time. The same causes under the same conditions have invariably the same effects. But we can never be

¹ *De la Methode*, VI., ii., 3. ² Phil. ii. 13.

sure that the same conditions prevailed owing to the presence of the unconditioned Spirit Who conditions everything else.

Lest this emphasis on the spiritual should cause men to lose their faith in the reality of the material, which is the medium of its expression and revelations, the doctrine of the Incarnation—one of the two great miracles of the Faith—comes in to save us from a pure idealism on the one hand, and from a barren materialism on the other, by assuring us of the supremacy of spirit and of the reality of matter. As an earnest of the Divine purpose “to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth,”¹ the Incarnation has a universal if little recognized significance, which is, however, of considerable philosophic value.

The Incarnation, accordingly, is the centre of our speculative thoughts as well as of our spiritual life. It helps us to interpret the whole system of things, and to understand the relation of spirit to matter and of God to man. Browning truly says :

“The acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.”

The question is frequently raised why the Incarnation should not have been non-miraculous. Mr. Thompson's hypothesis is, that “though no miracles accompanied His entry into, or presence in, or departure from, the world, though He did not think or speak or act otherwise than as a man; though He yields nothing to historical analysis but human elements, yet in Jesus Christ God is Incarnate—discovered and worshipped, as God alone can be, by the insight of faith.”² “We stand,” he says, “for a truer and fuller idea of the Incarnation

¹ Eph. i. 10. ² *New Testament Miracles*, p. 217.

than any that goes with a belief in miracles. Jesus Christ, as living in space and time, and as studied by historical science, is at once human and divine. But the divine in Him is entirely mediated by the human. . . . Again, as living out of space and out of time, and as studied by holiness and faith, He is still both human and divine. But now it is the human which is mediated by the divine. To the religious mystic and the saint there is nothing in Him which is not spiritual and divine."

Such is, indeed, a conception of an Incarnation which one may quite reasonably hold. But it would be contrary to the Christian faith to describe in such terms the Incarnation of our Lord. Such is not the Incarnation we have been taught to believe in. We do not recognize it. We do not believe in the Incarnation because we can conceive that an Incarnation might happen in that way, but because we are convinced that it did happen in a certain way. In the New Testament we find the evidence of it and of the way it occurred. We cannot separate the evidence of the fact from the evidence of the mode, for the event is inseparable both in our minds and in history from its manifestation. It is not convincing, then, when one borrows from the evidence of the fact the general idea of an Incarnation, but passing by the evidence of the mode, presents the idea in a manner of his own devising.¹ It may be striking and original, but it is not the Gospel.

Again, if the Christian world agreed in this generation to eliminate every thing save the ordinary

¹ *e.g.*, when he writes, "As we may believe with St. Mark that Jesus was born of human parents and yet was Divine, so we may believe with St. Paul that His human body remained in the grave" (p. 211)—a flimsy argument for which there is no support but guesswork.

and normal from the life of the Christ, and to reduce Him to purely human proportions in all things except the beauty of His character, the question is, would such a Christ be acceptable to a succeeding age? Would they be content to worship a non-miraculous Christ, One Who gave no sign of His divinity, One Who never revealed aught that would induce men to worship or adore, however they might admire and love Him? Do those who thus denude Him of His unique power show more sympathy with His Divine purposes, more insight into His Divine Nature, than those who regard the deeds He wrought in Palestine as but the exhibition on a small scale of the power He has exerted ever since in the history of the world and in the hearts of men? For the latter His miracles are not matters incredible and impossible; nay, a Christ Who in the days of His flesh was not "approved by mighty works, wonders and signs," even if there were higher proofs of His Divinity than these, would be rather incredible and impossible.

Furthermore, with regard to the attempt to remove all that savours of the miraculous from the Gospel records, the ill-success of their efforts can hardly satisfy those who have made the attempt. The words of Christ refuse to be wrested from His works. Many of His most characteristic sayings, such as "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees;" "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," are found in narratives that also record miracles, which thus constitute proofs of the great realities He claimed to be—the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd.

Can we, then, refuse to believe in the miracles of Christ, which are the evidences of His Divine Personality and the credentials of His Divine

Mission? "We can believe," says one writer¹ well, "if there be in us the bare rudiments of religious faith, such as Nature and our own selves instruct us in; if we have learnt the alphabet of religion, and are willing to learn more." "There is," as Pascal observes, "sufficient light for those who want to see, and sufficient darkness for those who do not want to see." "The natural man receiveth not the things of God." For the due appreciation of music and art, preparation is necessary; how much more is such preparation necessary for the understanding of matters of greater import, matters that concern the eternal future of the soul, especially in an age when a sceptical atmosphere has a deadening influence and paralyzing effect upon one's religious faculties and higher feelings?

Not only from the Gospels, but also from the Pauline Epistles we draw the inference that Christ was the most wonderful and marvellous Personality Who ever appeared in human life; and St. Paul supplies us with the natural and logical explanation, that He was the Son of God. In the intrinsic worth and excellence of that life, and in the testimony to His influence and gracious power borne by generation after generation of loving, adoring followers from "the days of His flesh," we have a proof of His unique greatness and miraculous nature which science cannot refuse to accept. Even if that Personality be obscured by the imperfect and fragmentary nature of the Gospel records, the description of His transcendentally praeternatural goodness and greatness in those memoirs must have been drawn from the life—for surely it was beyond the powers of men, however talented and brilliant, to invent it—and that life, the life of no ordinary man, the life of God's own Son.

¹ Warington, *Can we believe in Miracles?* p. 226.

CHAPTER VII

MIRACLE AND THE INCARNATION

IN this chapter we shall try to develop and explain more fully some of the important positions of the preceding chapter.

The Gospel miracles and prayer are in the same case. Both are opposed by Naturalism and both are supported by Supernaturalism. Naturalism, which has taken the place of the cruder materialism, excludes the possibility of any supernatural interference in nature, history, and personal experience. But Supernaturalism admits the possibility of the agencies of a higher realm interfering in the natural sequence of events in this. Between these two theories we must choose. If we hold that the universe is but one great unbroken chain of natural or physical causes and effects, we leave no door open for either miracle or prayer. But if we recognize the fact that, while the universe is one great unity of physical causes and effects, God is able by His spiritual agencies to break in upon that series, and reorganize it after such intervention, we leave a door open for both miracle and prayer. In our own experience we find that the spiritual and moral can intervene in the physical order every time we exert our own free wills. This shows that there are other forces and causes than the physical.¹

It is claimed that the scientific view—the view that God has constructed the Universe in such a way that it can attain its end without any interference on His part with its works—is more worthy of God

¹ We have seen already that the only true cause that we know of is this will of ours, and it is not physical.

than the view that the works must be overhauled at intervals. But that reasoning is the result of an antiquated conception of God, and of the Universe—the deistic conception of God, the mechanical conception of the Universe. The theory that God is related to the world as an engineer to his machine, treats the Deity as a Being external to His creation, entirely aloof, and transcendent. This view has given place to the view that God is immanent in His creation, indwelling in His Universe. Now, if He is indwelling or immanent in all things “from life’s minute beginnings up to man,” we may expect to find proofs of that fact in the order and arrangement of His creation. Suppose He were but one Divine Person, we would expect to find the unity of that Personality impressed upon the Universe and its system. There would be no sphere for the accidental or abnormal, no room for the contingent or phenomenal, because there would be no scope for interference with its laws. But if there be in the transcendental Unity of God what may be termed a personal plurality—an existence not of One Divine Person but of more Divine Persons than One—may we not be equally entitled to expect that in the fundamental unity of the Universe there will be evidence of a plurality of such Agencies, Whose Individuality would be expressed in the distinctness of Their acts, and Whose Unity would be shown in the fact that Their work leads in one and the same direction? And if that direction be a moral and spiritual one, be identified, in fact, with the Kingdom of God, it can only be attained by moral and spiritual Beings, not by machines going like clock-work. This implies room for the play of personal liberty and freedom from control, the possibility of interference with certain laws, in a word, of the manifestation of personality. If man can manifest his personality, his will by intervening in and

yet without interfering with the ordinary course of natural law, how much more can God ?¹

Now the Plurality of the Divine Personality, the very fullness of Godhead, the glory and grandeur of the Tripersonal God, is represented in the Old Testament as energizing or actively engaged in the Universe as the environment of man, and in the New as energizing or spiritually employed in man, both individually and collectively, as the very temple of God, the habitation of the Divine Spirit. "If any Man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We shall come to him and make Our abode with him."² "Work out your own salvation, for it is God Who energizes (ὁ ἐνεργῶν) in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."³ Accordingly, we have then in the very Divine constitution of things room for the work of Personal Agents, room for miracle and answer to prayer.

There is another point to be considered. Science itself must, as we have already remarked, admit at least three creative acts or epochs, new beginnings, or fresh departures in creation: first, when motion was introduced into the mass; secondly, when life was breathed into the creature; thirdly, when life became conscious. The theory of evolution is broken at least into three pieces "empirically successive but logically detached,"⁴ by chasms that

¹ This distinction is to be observed. The human will introduces another cause, frequently a determining cause, into the series. But it cannot interfere with any natural law, although it is able to effect its purpose by overruling the forces of nature. It is the very unyielding nature of natural law that enables the human will to accomplish its purposes. It is by obeying its laws that man controls nature. The world is, accordingly, under the rule of spirit.

² John xiv. 23.

³ Phil. ii. 12.

⁴ Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, ii., 401. Descartes mentions as the three miracles of God, His creation of the world out of nothing, the free will, and the Incarnation.

cannot be crossed, each being a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*. However it may explain away the significance of these new departures, these breaks in the law of continuity, science must admit that these instances of creative activity stand out distinctly, and that the course of development from star-mist to man has been in the direction of increased rationality. The very variations on which the evolutionist depends for the production of the species are contingent, matters of *chance*, not of cast-iron law or clock-work system. Here, then, is room for the display of personality, the Personality of God, Which surely is as free to interfere in the sequence of causes and effects as It is able to control them. It is admitted that God's power is seen in the unusual by many who do not seem to be aware that He is also to be found in the usual, and that He reveals Himself not only in the smallest variations from type that condition the development of the species, but also in the very beginnings of existence. This attitude is due to the false emphasis that has been laid upon the transcendence of Deity by both Deist and Unitarian. But thanks to the philosophy of the Trinity in Unity, we can understand that while Deity transcends nature He also energizes in nature, intervening in it as He wishes, controlling, directing and unifying all its multitudinous and multifarious movements.

Dr. Illingworth in his work *Divine Immanence*¹ illustrates this by the manner in which our spirit may be described as "immanent" in matter, and our soul in our body. "It not only works," he says, "through the brain and nervous system, but, as a result, pervades the entire organism, animating and inspiring it with its own 'peculiar difference'; so that we recognize a man's character in the expression of his eye, the tone of his voice, the touch

¹ p. 38 ; Macmillan's Cheap Series, 1904.

of his hand, his unconscious and instinctive postures and gestures and gait. Nor is this 'immanence' confined to the bodily organism. It extends in what may be called a secondary degree to the inanimate objects of the external world." Proceeding then to discuss the two different relations of transcendence and immanence that spirit has to matter, he says that "though logically distinct, these two relations are not actually separate, they are two aspects of one fact; two points of view from which the single action of our one personality may be regarded. As self-conscious, self-identical, self-determined, we possess qualities which transcend or rise above the laws of matter; but we can only realize these qualities, and so become aware of them, by acting in the material world; while, conversely, material objects—our bodies and our works of art—could never possibly be regarded as expressions of spirit, if spirit were not at the same time recognized as distinct from its medium or manifestation." When discussing the relation of the Supreme Spirit to the material Universe, he says, "We must proceed upon this analogy; for we have no other."

Bishop D'Arcy,¹ however, regards this as a misleading analogy. He prefers the analogy of the soul and its experience. "It is surely impossible now," he writes, "to base a doctrine of Divine immanence on any lower principle than the Hegelian one, the immanence of self-consciousness in experience." "As the *ego* creates and inhabits its own experience so does God create and inhabit nature. As the *ego* creates experience according to the rule of reason, which is the rule of necessity, so does God create His world, and it becomes a rationally-ordered cosmos, a reign of law. Nature is, therefore, full of reason, full of necessity. So far we have

¹ *Idealism and Theology*, p. 137. See chapter on Incarnation and Miracle.

regarded God as personal. But if God be also super-personal, and multipersonal, as Christian theology insists, we shall find more than mere law and the regular succession of necessary events. We shall find a contingent element marking the interaction of different persons." He proceeds to say that this is what is found. "And, further, we shall find that the elements which are necessary, and those which, relatively to them, are contingent, unite to form one universal system." The bearing of all this upon the question of miracle is obvious, for "it yields a view of the world as a state of things in which miracle is sure to occur if occasion demands it. If the coming of the Kingdom of God requires miracle, miracle will be." Such contingent elements must, however, bear a Divine character, if they are to be credited with a Divine origin. They must have a universal scope and constitute a new departure in religious life. Such is the character of the Christian miracles, of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of our God. They "constitute the most universally significant group of events in history."¹

As each previous Divine intervention in the history of creation raised creation to a higher round in the ladder of being, from motion to life, from life to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158. Bishop D'Arcy has well pointed out in an article (*Recent Movements in Philosophy*) the danger of the doctrine of Divine Immanence. Unless balanced by some doctrine of Divine Transcendence it leads to a shallow Pantheism. Examples of transcendence are seen in the development of higher types of existence, in the transcendence of man over nature, and in the power of the human will to overrule the forces of nature without interfering with its laws. At the same time these philosophical principles have obscured to some extent the loving Personality of the Divine Father. As has been observed by the President Emeritus of Harvard, "He now appears as incessant workman, as universal servant, as tireless energizer."—(*Twentieth Century Christianity*.)

feeling, these events have not only a world-wide significance, but the highest moral and spiritual value, preparing the way for the realization of the Kingdom of God by mankind. Of these the Incarnation falls into line with the Divine immanence in man, being the very culmination of that immanence. That immanence explains the phenomenon and authority of conscience, the varying forms of the Divine inspiration of man, and the tendency to believe in the probability and possibility of an incarnation.¹ This latter tendency to expect and believe in incarnations is found in the folklore of all nations, and however crudely and absurdly expressed, is evidence of the existence of an instinct which invented them because it required them, and which corroborates the Gospel story of an Incarnation which stands alone in its sublimity and spirituality.

The argument against the Incarnation, the fact of God becoming man, as miraculous, *i.e.*, as involving an extraordinary intervention in the ordinary course of nature, may be answered by showing that such an event is by its nature *ex hypothesi* unique. It stands alone, in a category by itself, and accordingly does not come into collision with any known order. It may be passing strange and wonderful beyond words, but it is not miraculous in the usual acceptance of the term. Nothing in the previous history of nature or experience of man creates a presumption against the possibility of such an event. It is, accordingly, to be judged on its own merits, and unless it

¹ This argument is well stated by Dr. Illingworth in *Divine Immanence*, c. iv., 44, Ed. 1904. "Man, we know, in uncritical ages tends to believe in incarnations; they are a common form of thought with him; he is predisposed in their favour; medicine men, priests, kings, prophets, and abnormal individuals of every kind being constantly regarded as embodied gods."

is intrinsically irrational and self-contradictory, there can be no logical ground for any presumption against it ; there can be no *a priori* reason against it. But if we allow that such an Incarnation took place, if in Christ we have the Lord of nature and life, there can be no antecedent presupposition against such wonderful acts as the raising of the dead and the healing of the sick, nay, there is a strong presupposition in their favour. We find that if such miracles are rejected, it is because the Incarnation itself, of which they would be a logical and natural consequence, has been rejected first ; and the ground for such rejection is the presupposition of its improbability, which is due to the human prejudice against all mystery. But in our present ignorance of the essential nature of man and God we are not qualified to say what is natural for God to do or become. If it was natural for Him to create man, it might be equally natural for Him to become man. These matters are all mysterious to us. In fact, all the ultimate realities of existence, life, will, feeling, thought, eternity and God are wrapt up in mystery. The mystery of the Incarnation cannot, therefore, constitute any presumption against it.

But supposing that there can be no *a priori* ground for the rejection of the Incarnation, supposing that there was nothing antecedently improbable or impossible in such an occurrence—which might be regarded as a manifestation, if not the very culmination, of the Divine immanence in human life, the very highest form of the intervention of the Divine Will in the natural order, and which is in complete accord with the expectations of mankind as expressed in their folklore and forms of religion—what proof is there that such an occurrence did actually take place ? The fact itself is a spiritual fact ; and its highest proof is not material but

spiritual, the Personality and Character of the Christ Himself. He appealed in the first instance to Himself, in the second, to His works. "Believe Me, that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, but if not (εἰ δὲ μὴ) believe Me for the very works' sake."¹ Those who had not sufficient spirituality in themselves to discern or appreciate the self-revelation of such a unique and Divine Personality He referred to His works. "The works which the Father hath given Me to accomplish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me."² "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, even if ye believe not Me,³ believe the works: that ye may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him."

The works were a sign of the Divine Immanence in Him, a witness of His Divine Mission, and of the Father's presence with Him.⁴ It is believed by many that our Lord's appearance among men was accompanied by works "which none other man did,"⁵ but others reject the Gospel records of that appearance because of those works. This line of action, however, creates greater problems than it solves. For if our Lord was what He claimed to be, such works as are recorded were the most natural episodes in His life, and in complete harmony with His Divine Character and Personality. Word answers to work and work to word, in the economy of the Incarnate Life. We cannot separate either the works from the teaching or the teaching from the works. And consequently the portrait we have in the Gospels is not the mere picture of a man, but the noblest attempt of the human pen to depict a God-man.

¹ John xiv. 11.

² John v. 37.

³ *καὶ ἐμοὶ μὴ πιστεύετε* that is, if you are not capable of the higher faith. (John x., 38).

⁴ "No man can do these signs which Thou doest *unless God be with him*"—John iii. 2.

⁵ John xv. 24.

When we contemplate the object of the Incarnation as Atonement, it seems even less miraculous. The sinlessness of Christ, indeed, being contrary to the usual order of human experience, is miraculous; but if it was found necessary to restore the order of life that had been broken by sin, is there anything antecedently improbable in the appearance of a sinless Man? As sin itself is a condition of lawlessness, a breach of the uniformity of God's moral order of life by the intervention of the human will in His work, is it improbable that God would restore that order, after it had been broken, by an intervention of His Divine Will? God's law is recognized and obeyed by everything in nature save man. Man alone has interfered with the Divine order. Is it improbable that God will interfere to restore His own order? If the sinlessness of a man, which was in accordance with the will of God, be an anomaly in the life of humanity, so is sin, which is a direct violation of the will of God by the will of man. If the Virgin-birth was a necessary condition of such sinlessness we, who know nothing about such a birth, are not qualified to express our opinion, independently of the Gospels, either as to its intrinsic improbability or to its actual occurrence. An abnormal birth may have been the most appropriate mode for the appearance of an abnormal life, for anything we know to the contrary. Moreover, the superhuman works which our Lord wrought were but the logical accompaniments and natural manifestations of a superhuman Personality. They were sympathetically wrought in mercy and in love,¹ and were most appropriate to His Divine Character. They were economically performed by One Who is represented as tempted to utilize His Divine powers, but kept them under restraint. They were

¹ With perhaps one or two exceptions referred to by Cardinal Newman.

symbolical deeds that manifested the connection between the material and the spiritual, and showed that the Lord of Nature was also the Lord of Spirit. Therefore He said to the sick of the palsy: "Thy sins be forgiven thee," before He bade him rise and walk.¹

In His teaching our Lord emphasized the connection of sin and disease and death, and declared His authority to forgive sins on earth, because sin was then regarded as the source of all the degradation, misery and evil, physical as well as moral, of human life, by reason of its connection with and effect upon the human body, independently of which there can be the motive but no overt act of sin. His works of healing, accordingly, possessed a higher significance than if wrought by a mere physician or faith-healer. They were signs of the change He was to effect in the restoration of human nature, in the regeneration of the entire personality. His own sinlessness was a proof that He had conquered sin in the body, and was an earnest of His restoration of the image and likeness of God in human life. His own Resurrection was a proof of the fact that He conquered death as well as sin in the body, and was an earnest of our victory over sin and death.

This is a step beyond the belief in His continued existence after death. Some recent writers, indeed, assert that there is no evidence for the empty tomb and the Resurrection from the dead, but only for certain spiritual appearances after death.² Here it must be sufficient to state that the Resurrection, as we believe it, was the logical conclusion of the Incarnation, the fitting conclusion of a sinless life, sin being, as we said, connected in the history, experience and belief of man with death. Christ's body being *ex hypothesi* sinless, it could not be held

¹ Matt. ix. 2 ; cf. Mark ii. 3 ; Luke v. 18f.

² J. W. Thompson, *New Testament Miracles*, p. 204.

by death. In our own experience we have had instances of the supremacy of mind over matter, of the way in which the soul moulds the body,

“For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form, and doth the body make,”

but we have no other instance of the power exerted by a sinless soul upon the human body, or of the manner in which it would change or alter it. We can only say that the Resurrection of our Lord, and His power of appearing as He chose in visible form and vision to His disciples, as described in the Gospels, seems to us the most natural result of His Incarnate Life, the most suitable conclusion of the supremacy He had previously displayed over matter, and of His victory over the cause and the consequence of sin, and was consequently a proof that He is able to restore our entire humanity, body, soul, and spirit, to the Divine idea. It is also to be remarked that “the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ claim to be facts exactly in the same sense; to be supported by evidence essentially indetical in kind, and to be bound together indissolubly as the ground-work of the Christian faith.”¹ Accordingly, if we admit the reality of His death and burial, we must admit the reality of His Resurrection. But then, as Pascal remarked, “There is sufficient light for those who want to see, and sufficient darkness for those who do not want to see.”

¹ Westcott, *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 3.

CHAPTER VIII

ABSTRACT QUESTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

IN this chapter we shall consider briefly certain abstract questions connected with the miracles of the Gospels. Of these questions there are three which concern respectively the metaphysical impossibility, the moral impossibility, and the physical impossibility of these miracles. As Mr. Thompson takes as the basis of his discussion Murray's definition¹ of a miracle as "*a marvellous event occurring within human experience, which cannot have been brought about by human power, or by the operation of any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the Deity or of some supernatural being; chiefly, an act (e.g., of healing) exhibiting control over the laws of nature, and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or is specially favoured by God,*" we must make it the basis of our even if we do not regard it as altogether adequate. It is in this sense of an incident which cannot be explained by any cause—natural or human, or by "the totality of intramundane factors," and not in the sense of something that involves a violation of the suspension of the laws of nature, that we shall

¹ *English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Vol. VI., p. 486. This definition is somewhat inadequate, as it excludes events which may be brought about by God by the operation of known natural laws, at an important crisis in His work, and just when the Divine Purpose needed them e.g., the holding back of the waters of the Red Sea may have been due to known and discoverable causes, but, even if so, it may be regarded as none the less a miracle, seeing that it happened *when needed*.

employ the term in this chapter, although we are aware of the fact that this definition excludes certain events which have been brought about by the operation of purely natural causes at certain critical times when they were needed.

Mr. J. M. Thompson, in his dissertation on the Gospel phenomena, is prepared to recognise them as miracles in this sense, if they happened as recorded. "Either these events," he says, "are miracles, or they never happened. The upshot of our enquiry is, that they never happened."¹

The late Archbishop Temple,² on the other hand, held that even if our Lord's cures were due to His power of mind over the bodies of men, and were not; therefore, miracles in the proper scientific sense, "being in themselves under the law of uniformity, they would still be miracles for the purposes of Revelation, in arresting attention and accrediting both the message and the messenger." Dr. T. B. Strong³ considers that some of the cases of healing may really be explicable in the same fashion as faith healing in the present day. "But, for the majority of the Gospel miracles," he says, "I cannot think that this method is adequate. They force us to declare whether we regard the stories as unhistorical or whether we have some comprehensive view of the world into which we can fit them."

It is, we may say, understood and accepted that the miracles of the Gospel were, *generally* speaking, "events which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency." For *ex hypothesi* if they could be proved to have been "brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency," they would

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 207.

² *Bampton Lectures*, 1884, p. 201f.

³ *Church Congress Report* (1912), p. 179.

not be miracles—unless, indeed, there was something miraculous in the opportuneness of their occurring when needed, because human power and natural agency imply the totality of intramundane factors. If we take a step beyond these, we are in the supernatural sphere. That is why Wendland ¹ defined these works of Christ as “events which cannot be explained from the totality of intramundane factors.” If there is nothing in nature or man to cause them, is there nothing in experience to explain them? Hume says, “If it (a miracle) were not contradictory to experience it would not be a miracle.”

Of course a thing may be contradictory to our general experience, and yet happen. But here it is a question of principle that is involved. If the principle of miracle as expressed in the works of Christ runs completely counter to the very principles on which the foundation of our experience is built up, then it is a metaphysical impossibility. If it involves such a radical alteration of our mental laws as the assertion that two and two makes five, or that the angles of a triangle make three right angles, then it is a scientific impossibility. If it implies such a self-contradiction as “a round square,” it is contrary to the abstract laws of thought, and consequently a logical impossibility. But if the Gospel miracle does not one of these things; if it simply involves a principle that has entered largely into the making of human experience, of which the religious element is generally, if not universally, the predominant, viz., the intervention of the divine in the human and of the spiritual in the natural, it is not a metaphysical impossibility. If the only condition that opposes its possibility is the resistance of the human and the natural to such interpenetration on the part of the divine and the spiritual, it

¹ *Miracles and Christianity*, p. 12.

is not a physical impossibility. If the only logical self-contradiction it involves is the interaction of the natural and the spiritual—of the human and the divine, which, however, did not seem to strike humanity in general as a self-contradiction, seeing that the conversion of the human into the divine was not only a valid but an almost universal concept—it is not a logical impossibility.

In the first place we put the metaphysical problem. For as metaphysics concern existence and the knowledge of that existence, if that branch of science pronounces the miracles of Christ—those which He performed and that which He was, the Divine-Man, the Word-made-flesh—not merely contrary to, but a contradiction of the laws of existence and the laws of the knowledge of that existence, it is a question whether we would not have to reconsider the whole case regarding such miracles.

It is necessary to insist here on the difference between "contrary to" and "a contradiction of." An in-coming tide is contrary to an out-going tide, but a tideless sea is the contradiction of both. A miraculous event is contrary to our ordinary experience, but it is not a contradiction of it. It does not compel us to reorganize our thoughts on new and contradictory lines. It does not reverse the order of life, force us to face the past instead of the future, or make us, metaphorically speaking, walk on our heads, speak through our noses, and hear with our lips. Should it do so, we would justly pronounce it irrational and absurd, judging it by the light of our God-given knowledge and our God-directed experience. But it does not do any such thing. It simply implies the introduction of a new force which brings about results that cannot be explained on any human or natural principle by man, results that are contrary to our uniform experience in this—that

they have never happened as far as we have seen ourselves or know, but are not contradictory of our experience, and therefore are not irrational. For it is found that water is converted in the vineyard into wine, and that the comparatively few scattered seeds in the course of time produce an abundant harvest. Similarly levitation is not an utterly unknown experience. These are but analogies, very distant, but quite sufficient to show that the works of the Lord are not to be described as a contradiction of experience, a turning of the waters of life and knowledge back upon their ancient source.

The metaphysical difficulty has been strongly stated by Hume. "A miracle," he says, "is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. As a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof which is superior."¹ On this argument he based his well-known maxim, "*That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony is of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.*"

Hume himself regarded it as an impossibility to find such testimony, for he says, "It is not contrary to experience for testimony to be false; but all alleged miracles are contrary to experience." We,

¹ Hume, *Essays* (Green and Grose), Vol. II., 93.

however, accept his challenge as far as the evidence of our Lord and His disciples is concerned. Our Lord Himself stands on a moral and spiritual eminence, towering aloft above the sons of men, as all those critics acknowledge who respect morality when they see it, through having their own sense of morality developed, even if their spiritual eyes are not opened to discern the Divinity of the Christ, the Godhead of the Son. In the case of such an One, the noblest, highest, purest, grandest, most spiritual Being Who has ever appeared in this life, the shoes of Whose feet Socrates and the Greek philosophers, the Baptist and all the prophets of Israel are not fit to kneel down and unloose, would it not be a greater wonder, a more astounding miracle, something altogether inexplicable from the principles of His life, something completely contradictory of all that was known and seen of Him, for His evidence to be false? To insert a falsehood in such a life and character would be to introduce something just as incongruous with it, just as foreign to it, just as unnatural to it as His own works were in perfect keeping with its benevolent motives, and in absolute harmony with its lofty purpose.

In the case, too, of His personal Disciples and Apostles, the men who organised the Church that was founded on His Risen Life, would it not be a greater miracle for their testimony to be false than for the fact of that Risen Life, of which they were witnesses, to be true? What witnesses of a fact are ready to seal their testimony, however convinced of its truth they may be, nowadays with their blood? I do not doubt that there would be found many to-day who would die to prove the truth of their words, if they were called upon to give or could give evidence of a fact of such transcendent importance for humanity, of such universal range and sublime a

nature as the Resurrection of the Christ. They would certainly die rather than deny it. Now, if the matter of the evidence the disciples gave was unusual, uncommon, extraordinary, contrary to every thing known before, the manner in which they bore their evidence, sealing it with their blood, was equally unusual, uncommon, extraordinary, and contrary to every thing known before. This is in keeping with the unwritten law that a much stronger evidence is required for such an unusual thing as a miracle than would be necessary to establish ordinary facts.

Furthermore, Hume assumes too much, and therefore protests too much. He assumes that there has always been a fixed and immutable order, "a firm and unalterable experience," to which miracle runs counter. This is questioned not only by those who affirm that there have been miracles in the past, but also by those who assert that facts are often discovered of which there has been no previous experience. Lotze did not believe in an invariable order.¹ There are also men of science in the present day who do not regard these laws as absolutely infallible, or as complete inductions, or as universal generalizations, seeing that there are exceptions to every rule. If Hume's argument means, as Mill² asserts, that if an alleged fact be

¹ Lotze says, "Conformity to a universal law is not the only conceivable form in which we may make that supposition of a 'universal relation of mutual dependence between all things real' which is the common foundation of all scientific investigation. Things may be conceived as related to each other 'not primarily by permanent laws but by the unchangeable purport of a plan'; and the realization of this plan may require from the several elements 'not always and everywhere an identical procedure, but a changeable one.'"—*Metaphysik*, Vol. I., 18 (E. T.).

² *A System of Logic*, p. 408.

"in contradiction to a completed generalization grounded on a rigorous induction" it is both impossible and incredible; as applied to the Gospel miracles it is open to the objections (1) that the evidence of experience to which its appeal is made is at best only negative evidence, and thus cannot establish a positive position, and (2) that, as has been pointed out above, it takes too much for granted, and assumes that what is impossible to man and to the present modes of thought is impossible under any circumstances and to God. In fact, it is logically impossible to prove the negative.

As regards the physical impossibility of the Gospel miracles, science can neither affirm nor deny. Science has absolutely nothing to say to matters which are outside its province, and cannot be either scientifically explained or scientifically opposed. A miracle is, indeed, a physical impossibility, using miracle in the sense of something that cannot be explained from the totality of natural causes or factors, if such causes or factors exhaust reality.

In the first place we shall see that nature regarded from the aspect of matter alone is not all. Haeckel, the spokesman of modern materialism, was compelled to invest the material atom with both sensation and will. The atom was regarded by him as *beseelt*, or animate, on the principle that if you do not bespeak a soul within your atoms, you will never get it out of them.¹ In the *Riddle of the Universe* ² he says, "We shall give to this material basis of all psychic activity, without which it is inconceivable, the provisional name of 'psychoplasm'." This shows that even materialists have given up the notion that nature *qua* matter is all. If it were, how could it be *known*?

¹ See Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, II., 399.

² p. 32.

In the second place, nature regarded from the standpoint of mind, the *ego*,¹ is not all. To reduce our knowledge of the world to a series of subjective impressions and inward experiences is correct enough; but to reduce the world itself to such is entirely absurd. If such were the case, there would be no past history and no possible future apart from our *ego*. Nature, then, from the standpoint of the *ego* is not all.

Neither is nature regarded from the standpoint of both matter and mind, considered as separate entities (Dualism), sufficient to explain the manner in which the material and the mental are brought into relation with one another. It was for this reason that Descartes found the idea of the existence of God, through whom matter and mind are indirectly related, necessary to his system; and that Geulinx invented his theory of Occasional Causes,² which explained the correspondence while securing the independence of both mind and matter. No influence was ever supposed to pass between body and soul, "but on occasion of a corporeal change God put an idea of it into our mind; and on occasion of a volition on our part God moved the limb and did the act for us." Geulinx was thus compelled to have resort to a miraculous intervention of the supernatural whenever we wish or move. For the same reason Leibnitz conceived a pre-established harmony to exist between the "monads," another miracle.

On the other hand, Spinoza postulated a Deity as universal substance embracing both matter and

¹ This view is known as Panegoism or Solipsism, and the panegoistic point of view is reduced to the following strange position by A. C. Fraser (*Philosophy of Theism*, pp. 72, 73): "Nothing now appears in the universe of existence but conscious mind; and the only mind I am conscious of is my own."

² Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, I., 157.

mind as its attributes, and secures their harmony while abolishing their independence as separate entities, but he only obtained this harmony by denuding both the macrocosm and the microcosm, both God—if you can speak of God at all in this system—and man of will. In this scheme of things, accordingly, there is no room for miracle, for everything moves by clockwork, or for will. Accordingly, Spinoza fails to account for all the phenomena of life. Consequently neither Materialism, Panegoism, nor Spinozism, which have failed to account for all the phenomena and realities of life, are qualified to state that a miracle—that is, something which cannot be explained by natural causation—is physically impossible.

On the other hand, Theism,¹ while insisting upon the omnipresence and omnipotence and omniscience of God, does not maintain His immutability in the sense of rigidity. God is unchangeable in His purpose, but in His modes of carrying out His plan variety is necessary. Here, then, is room for miracles, that is, for “special acts of God which, departing from the ordinary method, were performed in the sight of men for a moral purpose. Whether miracles have been wrought, whether some given event is a miracle, are questions of evidence; but the possibility of such acts cannot be denied, except by Atheism, or by Pantheism that makes God unfree. If God is a free Spirit, immanent and transcendent, not limited to what He is doing, miracles are possible, and may occur on sufficient occasion.”²

¹ In his recent Gifford Lectures Mr. Balfour proved the necessity for Theistic setting. Theistic setting was essential, he said. If they wanted to retain their values undiminished in a domain of beauty, morality or science, there was but one setting, and that setting was belief in God.

² W. N. Clarke, *Outline of Christian Theology*, pp. 133, 134.

There is, however, another aspect of the matter. The moral impossibility of miracles has been maintained by Deists. They urge that it is inconsistent with the character of God to alter the course of nature¹ which has been settled by His wisdom and power, that He cannot change it for the better and will not change it for the worse. In fact, His changing of it would imply that He was changeable Himself, and that would be a moral imperfection in Him. The assumption of the Deists is twofold: First, that God must have designed the very best possible world, incapable of any improvement whatsoever; and secondly, that a world in which everything had been arranged beforehand on the clock-work system is the very best. But in such a world there would be no freedom of will, no play for the human personality, and consequently no scope for moral and religious education. Such a system would certainly reduce miracle to a mechanical impossibility. The "moral" aspect of the question does not belong here, for such only comes before us in a system in which freedom of will is allowed for in the case of both God and man, as there can be really no "morality," no seeking of the good for the sake of the good, in a cast-iron system. The position of one who, believing in a rigidly uniform course of things, affirms that God in working miracles is contradicting Himself, is exactly on a par with the position of one who, believing that the equality of all men in the sight of God is a postulate of the religious consciousness, holds that for God to intervene in certain cases is to degrade Himself by showing favour.² The

¹ Peter Annet, "To change the course of nature is inconsistent with the attributes of God."—*Supernaturals Examined*, p. 127. Annet died in 1768.

² See Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis*, p. 433.

conclusions drawn from the premises are valid in both instances, but the premises in both cases are not accurately stated. They are employed to embrace more than they logically can. The order of the world is certainly uniform in one sense, but not such as to exclude variety and change. The equality of men is assured by a universal principle as far as their human nature is concerned, but it does not involve equality of talents, chances, or character. There is no physical, spiritual or moral equality among men. The sinner is not on the same platform as the saint in God's sight. Therefore, God does not show partiality, but justice, when He hears the prayer of the just and refuses to hear the prayer of the unjust, while He shows His impartiality to them as men by giving them all equally, without distinction, the natural blessings, *e.g.*, the sunshine and the rain. A change in the Divine mode of action does not argue a change in the Divine character any more than a change in a man's mode of action proves that he has altered for the worse. In fact, when a miracle is regarded, as it is by Theists, as a "special act of God, departing from the ordinary method, performed in the sight of men for a moral purpose,"¹ it can hardly be regarded as something inconsistent with the Divine attributes, of which love and holiness are pre-eminent. Accordingly, we may say that, given a system in which freedom of will is allowed for both God and man, a miracle in the sense of a special act performed by God out of the ordinary course, for the moral benefit of man, is quite possible. We have found that miracle is not a physical impossibility, for that would be to limit the Divine to a physically conditioned activity, that is, to a mode of natural causation. This we have

¹ W. N. Clarke, *loc. cit.*

seen is not adequate to explain all the phenomena and realities of experience, and to limit God to it is not to treat Him as God at all. We have also found that it is not a moral impossibility, for that would be to assume that physical immutability was the essential condition of moral perfection, which no rational person will maintain. For that would be to take a topsy-turvy view of moral life, and to invert the rational and natural order of things, in which the physical takes the lower place and the spiritual the higher.

Finally, one might ask, if miracles are neither physically nor morally impossible, is there any probability that they might occur? This is a question which depends on two factors, (1) the Divine relation to life and man, and (2) the human need. With regard to the Divine relation to life and humanity we have already seen that God is immanent in nature and life. The creation is still going on. The Father is still working, according to the Theism of Jesus and of the Fourth Gospel. With what object? we ask, and Revelation answers: In order to reconcile and recapitulate all things in Himself, to complete and round off the universal system of life and thought, of mind and matter, for Himself in His Representative, the God-Man, in order to harmonise and unify in Him the universe of beings. If this assumption of Theism is a fact, it will make not only a Revelation, but a miraculously given and accompanied Revelation, an antecedent probability and possibility.

But it is in relation to human need that the Divine Nature shines forth pre-eminently in a Fatherhood that not only creates but gives. We have learnt from both Scripture and experience that man's extremity is God's opportunity. Nature does not exhaust either the Divine activity or the

Divine Heart. Nature does not deprive man of his freedom, shall it reduce the Divine Maker to an automaton? Shall it prevent Him from intervening in the annals of human life, and satisfying the manifold needs of man as Redeemer and Saviour, as Spiritual Master and Instructor in Righteousness, as One Who hears the prayers of men, as One Who changes them from evil unto good, as One Who heals their mental and spiritual diseases, Who forgives their sins, comforts and binds up their broken hearts, and lifts them up with the glorious hope of the life of the world to come, the life immortal and Divine? For all this is only to be reasonably expected, seeing that we have such a Father-God as the Christ revealed. He has done all this, and is doing all this still. The miracle is in progress.

CHAPTER IX

THE GOSPEL MIRACLES IN RELATION TO NATURE

WE have already pointed out that there are three words for miracle in the Greek Testament, *teras*, *dunamis*, *semeion*,¹ which emphasise different aspects of the miracle, and must be, each and all, taken into account in estimating the *rationale* of these Gospel phenomena.

In the first place, they are wonders that attract attention and challenge enquiry. In the second place, they are wonders wrought by an adequate cause or agency, works of power, deeds done by "an outstretched arm" or by a "mighty hand." In the third place, they are wonders that teach a moral lesson, that have spiritual purpose. The fact that they are "signs" lifts the marvel out of the physical order into the moral and spiritual order.

An event appears marvellous which differs from, or is contrary to, our experience. We cannot say it is *a priori* impossible for that reason, for on that very ground a person who had never seen or heard of an eclipse, or a waterspout, or a submarine at work or an aeroplane flying, or a message sent and received by wireless telegraphy, and a ship saved by such a message, would be perfectly justified in flatly denying that such things were facts, because they were contrary to his experience. Facts and phenomena that are marvels, that is, contrary to previous experience, are not, accordingly, *a priori*

¹ (a) *τέρας*, Heb. מֹפֶת (*Mopheth*), and פֶּלֶא (*pele'*), wonder or marvel; (b) *δύναμις*, (Hebrew, "strong hand and stretched-out arm," Deut. xxvi. 8); (c) *σημεῖον* (Hebrew, אֵימָה *'Oth*), sign.

impossible and incredible. The argument of Hume against miracles tells with equal force against every new and startling discovery in science. For, if faith in every case is to be determined by the balance of probabilities, the probability against such would be greater than the probability for. It is always more probable that testimony should be false than that a miracle should be true. There is always the prejudice of ignorance against the unknown, which is alleged to be "contrary to experience," even when there is no experience at all to appeal to. Hume's argument is sound so far as the phenomenon is simply regarded as a phenomenon, and the miracle as a miracle, apart from circumstances or cause. The phenomenon of frozen water would be a physical impossibility if regarded by itself. But if the cause and circumstances are taken into account, the case bears a different aspect. And when these, the cause, agency and circumstances, are new and unknown, Hume's canon cannot be applied, for the appeal to experience against the phenomenon taking place is utterly irrelevant when there is no experience against. This canon cannot, therefore, apply to the Gospel miracles, for they are not simply recorded as marvels, and declared worthy of credence as such. For as marvels they would never have been believed. But they are marvels that took place under circumstances, conditions, and through an agency completely outside of our experience.

It is, however, a mistake to imagine that Scripture teaches us that such miracles are the only works of God, the only evidence of His existence and government. Everything is attributed to Him. Man's soul owes its origin to God "breathing into his nostrils the breath of life,"¹ and the whole creation is attributed to that Spirit in the passage :

¹ Gen. ii. 7.

"Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created,
And Thou renewest the face of the earth." ¹

It is due to the operation of the same Spirit that the Incarnation took place. "She was found with child of the Holy Ghost." ² Everything except evil is, accordingly, a work of God. They differ in this, that some have a different relation to nature and a higher significance for man. They are not the ordinary works of God, and they have a special reference to the needs and salvation of humanity. There are people who object that miracles and ordinary events cannot both come from the same agency. This is the Deistical argument, which, as we have already seen, insists on the uniformity of nature. There are others who object to miracles on the ground that miracles postulate an agency which they say nature does not require. This is the Atheistical argument, which maintains the self-sufficiency of nature.

But what does this belief in the uniformity of nature amount to? We employ it to a certain extent when we expect that things will follow each other with more or less regularity. This expectation is, to a certain degree, the background of our thoughts and our experience. It is the apparent exceptions and surprises that strike us and make us conscious of that regularity. But this principle does not imply that things or phenomena must always follow each other in the same order. For no phenomena must always follow each other in the same order. For no phenomenon is exactly like another, and no phenomenon is simple. It may be true that the same cause will have, and has generally, the same effect. But no cause is ever exactly like any other. Suppose, for example, another case arises in which the same cause appears under slightly differing circumstances, the result must be different. The inference of science

¹ Ps. civ. 30.

² Matt. i. 18.

would have to be that the uniformity of nature had been broken, if it took so narrow a view of things. But it is content with an approximate generalization here. There would be nothing in this to make the idea and fact of miracle impossible and incredible, for as the cause differs in some way, however slight, from every other known cause, we cannot declare that the effect must be exactly the same as the previous effect. All that can be said is, that every phenomenon is the result of the laws of the forces and the properties of the matter employed in its production, and that these laws and properties are unchanging.

Again, if by uniformity of nature we mean the way in which phenomena are brought about, every phenomenon being the result of the same kind of force upon the same species of matter, we would have, indeed, a simple definition, but one that would require a less complicated machinery than our nature in which force and matter are only found in combination with other forces and other substances. We have here, indeed, a more scientific definition, but one that equally fails to create an *a priori* presupposition against the miracles of the Gospel. For in the first place, we do not know all the kinds of matter and force there are in nature; and in the second place, we do not know all the properties and laws of the matter and the force we do know. We do not know all their possible combinations, much less do we know all the possible phenomena they are capable of producing. We also find that certain substances, as oxygen, and phosphorus, have developed different properties,¹ and that the laws of

¹ In 1840 oxygen was found to combine with silver, which it had refused to do before, under the same conditions of temperature, and in 1844 phosphorus, which had been hitherto regarded as highly inflammable, was found to be quite the contrary.

certain forces, *e.g.*, heat, are not always uniform.¹ Would it not be unscientific to give up our belief in the uniformity of nature because of these inexplicable variations? Would it not be more unscientific not to believe that there is something here that we cannot explain with our present knowledge? This should be our attitude with regard to the Gospel miracles. We do not give up our belief in the uniform and natural order of the Divine Government because of these strange happenings; and aware of our limitations and our ignorance of both the forces of nature and the properties of its matter, we do not feel compelled to regard miraculous occurrences—which are at present inexplicable—as violations of that order, no matter what amount of evidence we require in order to believe them. This is quite another thing.

On the subject of the Resurrection the new scientific theory of matter may throw a side light. According to the old view matter was regarded as a hard, impenetrable substance, subject to definite laws, containing in itself the promise and potency of all terrestrial life. We can easily conceive that such a material conception of the macrocosm and the microcosm was opposed to the spiritual and its interventions. But that theory has been discarded in favour of the view that “the material atoms themselves consist of a complex aggregate of subtle elements more or less approaching to ether, and revolving in an incessant gravitative motion,”² that “ether is the necessary agent of all known and unknown manifestations of energy,”³ and that when we push the analysis yet farther, matter and force become confounded, and the only effective reality

¹ *e.g.*, when raising water from 32° Fahr. to 39° it contracts, contrary to the law that heat expands.

² Louis Elbe, *The Future Life*, p. 237. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

remaining is the invisible ether. "In the study of its manifestations we must seek the history of the Universe."¹ The ether, as this mysterious medium is called, is an invisible and all-pervading, all-directing and all-transmitting fluid, which ensures the unity of the universe. It is not entirely immaterial, as its atoms must have a certain volume, which, however, is infinitely small compared with that of physical atoms, but its properties are quite distinct from those of ordinary matter, being incompressible and imponderable. It is the medium that connects world and world, atom and atom, oscillating with inconceivable rapidity. It transmits electricity and light, and its rotatory vortex-like motion is the ultimate explanation of both matter and force.

Science has been compelled to assume the existence of this semi-material and semi-spiritual fluid, intangible and imponderable world. In other words science has been forced to admit that the world, its matter and its movement, is ultimately one grand mystery, and that some entity more akin to the spiritual than to the material is the key of the mystery. Accordingly, the transformation and control of cosmic phenomena by One so endowed as our Lord is scientifically conceivable, but not their destruction, according to the law of indestructibility which ensures the conservation of matter and the conservation of energy. That law throws light on the Resurrection, which science does not regard as a restoration of the identical material and ever changing molecules which compose the body during life, but as the conservation of the permanent and *etheric* element which gives the body both life and form. This view might help one to understand certain things connected with our Lord's Resurrection, which the theory of material resurrection cannot explain.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

The Gospels imply that there was a new and a Divine cause at work which acted like the human mind that puts into play natural forces and produces natural results, but results which nature, left to herself, would never bring about. We know nothing of the laws according to which that Divine cause acts ; but we are informed that the results in the main were quite natural, Nor do we know the laws by which the human mind acts on matter and material forces, for here we have gone beyond the bounds of physical science ; unless, indeed, we are rash enough to go back to the old-established theory that mind itself is a form of matter and that man is but a machine. Of course, if man is an automaton and can only act when his strings are put in motion by some external cause, it makes no difference to him whether he believes or does not believe in miracles. If he has no free-will or power of self-determination, if his freedom of will is but an illusion, he can hardly imagine any Being superior to himself as endowed with such, much less as deliberately designing and causing certain phenomena to take place for his spiritual and moral improvement.

But this mechanical theory of man fails to explain the numbers of things which are entirely different from natural phenomena, and which are produced by man himself, acting not only independently of, but actually controlling nature and its forces and matter, and which mind alone can explain. Natural causes, for example, could not produce a *Titanic*, even though they played a great part in its making and in its destruction, unless directed by the mind of man. These works of man's brain are phenomena that are found in nature, but are no part of its proper course. In this respect they are like miracles. Nature alone could not of itself bring about the combination of causes that would be sufficient to

produce a miracle. As we analyse the causes that bring about one of the former phenomena we finally reach the mind and will of man as a directive force. As we analyse the causes that are responsible for one of the latter we eventually arrive at a Mind as superior to man's mind in power as those miracles are to his performances, and in spirituality as the purposes of such miracles as the Incarnation and Resurrection excel all human designs and intentions. If we, then, are allowed to assume the existence of a Ruler of nature Who is also a Moral Governor of the world,¹ there can be no *a priori* objection to miraculous occurrences on the ground of their being impossible or unreasonable. For all that is required is to show that the agency is sufficient and the purpose reasonable. For both of these there would be sufficient warranty in the Divine Personality of a Natural Ruler Who is also a Moral Governor. The very uncommonness and special character of miracles bring that Personality more vividly before us than ordinary occurrences could do. This appears to be their intention.

At the same time it is to be remembered that natural phenomena themselves are to be traced back to the same source as miracles.² Both the ordinary and the extraordinary require the existence

¹ The existence of the Ruler of Nature is established by natural proofs, proofs founded on nature, its laws, constitution, and organism, and on those phenomena which are called miracles; but the existence of a Moral Governor of mankind is established independently by proofs founded on the moral and spiritual constitution of man, his conscience, his sense of duty, of right and wrong, of dependence, and his desire for immortality. Harmony existing between the physical and the moral system would entitle us to regard the Author of the one to be the Ruler of the other, and so of both.

² As J. S. Mill says, "The validity of all inductive methods depends on the assumption that every event or beginning of every phenomenon must have some cause."—*System of Logic* III., 21, 1.

of a controlling, directing Mind. In the former we see the chain of causes and effects more directly and distinctly than in the latter. The difference is, accordingly, one of degree, not of kind. In fact, any initial phenomenon, *i.e.*, the first of its kind, is both in external appearance and internal causation a miracle. The only difference is in the purpose. Miracles are, accordingly, in harmony with nature in this respect, that neither can be accounted for without God.

But this postulate is refused not only by those who deny but also by those who do not deny the existence of a God, but who do deny our powers of knowing whether there be a God or not. They call in question the sufficiency of the evidence for this belief. Now we shall make them this concession; if they can show that nature itself is capable of explaining itself without a Creator, without a First Cause, uncaused, Who set its forces in action, at least once, we shall allow that the existence of God is a matter of reasonable doubt. Let them prove that matter, force and their laws, can create themselves, set themselves in action, and adapt themselves, by combinations manifold and complex, to certain wise, noble and moral ends, such as the well-being of man. If matter and force that have never been known to create, that have never been believed by man in his natural state to create, can be proved to have created not merely other phenomena, but themselves, and to have done this according to an intelligent design and with a moral intention, we shall have a miracle greater than any recorded in Scripture, for we shall have an effect without a sufficient cause. Moreover, we shall require equally strong evidence not only for the alleged fact, but also for the effects of the fact, as is furnished in Scripture for the facts of the Incarnation and the Resurrection and in the

history of the Church for the effects thereof. Until this proof and evidence are forthcoming, we shall go on believing that the existence of God is necessary to explain nature, and that nature itself is, accordingly, sufficient evidence for that existence.

Scripture represents God as the Creator and Maker and Ruler of the Universe. At least it suggests a sufficient cause for the effect. In this it is more logical than its opponents whose scientific beliefs, as Mr. Balfour has recently proved, involve some fundamental principle of Natural Theology. But it is not contented to furnish an adequate cause ; it supplies us with a sufficient reason and purpose. In this it is more philosophical than its opponents, who can furnish no sufficient agency, and find no adequate purpose for the *esse*, much less for the *bene esse* of nature and man in their natural causation, and who object to miracles because they postulate the intervention of what is the only sufficient cause for the existence, and activity, and adaptation to certain moral ends, of nature itself. We may go further, and say that nature itself is inexplicable if the Maker Himself be unable to intervene and energize in its various and manifold activities. In fact, the more the subject is studied philosophically the more the apparent discordance between the natural and the miraculous becomes reduced to a difference between a more general and a less general activity on the part of the same Great Cause.

The Gospel miracles are not, then, merely marvels ; they are "mighty works," works wrought, as we hold, by a sufficient Agency. For we will surely be granted that if nature requires for the explanation of the beginning and continuance of its existence a Divine Author, the Cause of all, Himself uncaused, such a Divine Author can still put forth His energy

to create new phenomena in nature, as He did at the beginning and at various epochs in the history of the earth and its inhabitants. Otherwise a sufficient reason will have to be given for the cessation and intermission of His energy in nature, and the loss of His power and control over the phenomena of nature. At present, while the limitations of our knowledge prevent us from drawing a hard and fast line between the probable and the improbable, we have many reasons to justify us in asserting that if our assumption of a Divine Author, which is necessary to explain the very beginning and continuance of nature,¹ be allowed, such miracles are both possible and credible, when there is sufficient evidence for their occurrence and proof that the end was worthy of the agency employed.

For the Gospel miracles were not merely works of wonder and power, they were signs. They were not merely wrought by sufficient agency, but also for a suitable object and purpose. They are to be regarded, therefore, especially in reference to their ends. As has been well said, "Their relation to those ends, therefore, far more than their manner of causation, or phenomenal character, constitutes their proper essence, to which all else is subordinate."² What purpose did they fulfil in the economy of the life of mankind? That is the question. If their ulterior end was the revelation of some truth about God's relation to man, an insight into the Maker's power over the mysterious processes of nature, an indication of some fact

¹ This is not the only argument for Theism. As Mr. Balfour showed in his recent lecture, the presence of a Universal mind, which besides creating the world creates standards for all the great values in Truth, Æsthetics and Morals, seems a necessary postulate for all who feel the necessity of employing such standards.

² Warrington, *Can we believe in Miracles?* p. 166

that was necessary to the well-being and salvation of man, it would be (1) in harmony with what the constitution of nature reveals generally of the mind and character of the Creator, wise adaptation and thoughtful and benevolent design both for the lower and the higher forms of life ; and (2) it would be in keeping with what a study of the constitution of man would lead us to expect. The just inference from man's intimations of immortality, his feeling of right and wrong, his instinct to worship, his sense of duty to and dependence on a higher authority than himself, the discomfiting sense of failure, and sin, is that there is a Moral Governor of mankind. These intimations, feelings and senses would seem to be universal, from the universal or almost universal prevalence of such ideas, which are called religious. Agnostics may characterize such as the superstitious innovations of a priesthood or as delusions of the imagination, but they are for all that the fundamental phenomena in the constitution of humanity and, like miracles, must be explained rationally and sensibly.

Now if there be a Moral Governor of mankind, it is only rational to suppose that He would and will supply every want in the moral and spiritual life of man, as He has made and makes provision for every want in his physical life, and especially that want of Him which man feels, and which God creates and fosters. In whatever terms we may define that want, whether as need of "more life and fuller," of more light and brighter, of more love and holier, of more opportunities to know and serve and work for God and our brother man, of forgiveness of sin, of deliverance from sin, of redemption and salvation, of regeneration and resurrection, and of the communion of saints, it is the one great need in its many aspects and manifold

forms which the Moral Governor of mankind alone has created and which He alone can supply. Can we doubt His willingness or His power to supply that need? We can surely argue that it would be more probable *a priori* that such a need would be supplied than not, when we have regard (1) to the proofs of beneficent design and adaptation in nature, and (2) to the craving for forgiveness of sin and for a fuller knowledge of God in man, owing to his own nature, which has been created moral, intelligent and spiritual, and capable of greater development by God, and (3) to the contrast of the Divine sufficiency with man's insufficiency.

Again, in whatever manner He chooses to satisfy that want, whether by giving to His servants who are devoted to His work, and love to serve Him and to think of Him in His relations to man and the universe, a deeper insight into the loving purpose of the Divine Fatherhood to redeem and restore humanity, a more spiritual understanding of the sacred discipline of pain and sorrow, a clearer conception of His Divine Personality and His human heart, or a broader notion of the brotherhood of humanity, and a grander idea of the sublime destiny of mankind, his ultimate realization of the Divine ideal, it is the one great supply in its various manifestations and many portions which comes to man from his Divine Governor and God. When such comes to man, can there be any doubt from Whom it comes, if it bears the signature and impress of the loving-kindness, goodness, and grace of God? Whether it be a divinely inspired word, or a divinely significant work, it is a "sign," a revelation from God to man. We can surely argue *a posteriori* that, having regard to so many instances of what can not be other than Divine interventions in our lives, as well as in the lives of the saints and

scribes of the Church, gracious leadings and guidances and providences in our own experience as well as in the experience of the Church, there have been many such "signs" from God to man. Of these the chief are the "signs" of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of our Lord, Whose many "signs" were given in evidence of His transforming, renewing, regenerating and raising power over humanity.

Can there be any doubt that such signs were adapted to the purpose of revelation? We are not qualified to say that they were the only means available for God to make known more of His will and mind to man than the latter can attain in the ordinary course of life and intellect. We can only judge of their suitability to His purpose to reveal to man what natural knowledge could not convey. For anything that is outside the ordinary beaten track of the human mind is adapted to impress that mind, and to make it observe, reflect and remember; and we know from the results of these "signs" that they were eminently calculated to produce these effects.

The argument that such "signs," being deviations from the ordinary course of nature, are inconsistent with the character of Him "Who changes not," is weak because it assumes that God does not allow change to enter into His system, whereas variation from type is recognized by men of science to be one of the laws that control the evolution of the species.¹

It is also argued that because God is omniscient He is able to provide beforehand for every contingency without such variation. But those who assert this fail to see that such deviations and variations from the uniform order of things are represented in prophecy as part of a great scheme

¹ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 29.

long foreseen and deliberately planned beforehand, and wrongly assume that the only mode of action consistent with such Divine attributes is one of monotonous uniformity. We wonder, then, how these "signs" fail to represent God as immutable and omniscient when they reveal in a special and particular manner what natural history, science and religion cannot, the unchanging nature of His love and graciousness, and the wonderful wisdom and knowledge of Him Who adapts means so complex to ends so sublime. The Gospel "signs" of the Lord and His Apostles, as we have seen in a previous chapter, were specially intended to draw men's attention to their revelation of the spiritual laws of the Supreme Father, Who is immutable in His righteousness and in His great purpose to redeem mankind; and omniscient in the many ways He employs to bring the truth within the reach of mortal mind. Such "signs" were in perfect keeping with that scheme of revelation; they promoted it, they illuminated it. We cannot say they were indispensable, but they were by no means superfluous. They played an important rôle in drawing attention to the Messenger and His message, and they illustrated the teaching in such a remarkable manner that they have been described as "parables in action." The function of the Gospel miracles is, then, primarily, to be a witness of Christ,¹ to illustrate His teaching, to reveal the Father. We are not asked to believe them because their credibility and possibility have been established. Neither are we required to understand their *modus operandi* or the conditions that had to be fulfilled in order that they should be wrought, or even the

¹ John v. 36: "The same works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me."

purpose which was to be effected by them, but only to view them in the light of the character of Christ !

If we believed that our Lord was supernatural, that He was no ordinary product of humanity, that He was marvellous in every respect, in character, conduct, action and life, personality and power, then His " signs " fall into their place in the economy of His wonderful life. They become so many facets of the pure crystal of His Being ; so many indications of His power to raise and redeem, transform and purify, ennoble and restore the moral and physical constitution, however shattered, however ruined, however degraded, of humanity.

To sum up our results, we have seen that the Gospel miracles are not, then, merely marvels, but marvels wrought by an adequate agency and for a sufficient end. We must keep in view the sufficiency of both the agency and the end in all the miracles. If the agency was inadequate and the end unsuitable or unworthy, we would be compelled to assert the utter improbability of these miracles. But it has not been proved, we submit, that the uniform law of nature that every effect must have a sufficient cause has been violated in the Gospel phenomena. Even the marvellous feats of modern science would be utterly impossible and inexplicable unless the agency and the end were sufficient and adequate. But no matter how impossible it seems *a priori*, it is no harder to believe in the making of the Panama Canal than it is in the digging of a ditch, if the agency employed be sufficient to effect it, and if the object of making it be worthy of the attempt. Similarly with the phenomena of the Gospel we must pass through the very same steps, and examine them in reference to both agency and purpose, before we can say that we believe in them. If we find that however marvellous they are, there is good foundation

for the belief that they are brought about by special Divine agency, and for a high moral and spiritual end, in the fact that those who were original witnesses submitted to new rules of life, and suffered willingly in attestation of and because of their belief in such miracles, are we justified in rejecting them and their evidence without due consideration because they clash with our fundamental hypothesis that miracles do not happen? Are we justified in prejudging the case of the Gospels and regarding them or those sections of them which contain miraculous stories as belonging to the sub-apostolic age, or as unhistorical because they relate miraculous events? Are we justified in comparing the miracles of the Gospels with ecclesiastical miracles, and in searching for older sources which are free from miracle?

NOTE ON THE LAW OF UNIFORMITY.

Natural law is identified with physical law by certain who regard the nature-miracles of the Gospels as breaches of that law. But the operation of physical law such as the law of gravitation is counteracted or suspended by the human will every time a man intentionally stands up. How much more likely is the operation of such a law to be contravened by a will higher and greater than the human! Physical causation is therefore not the only causation. Others, however, would identify natural law with the law of uniformity, which they consider to be broken by such nature-miracles. But this law only means that if x produces y it will always produce y . But if something new is added to x , something different from y must follow. It is no longer x but x raised to the n th power, and this will produce y^n without breaking the law of uniform sequence of cause and effect. Now, the Gospels declare that in Jesus a new power was revealed in humanity. Accordingly the law of uniformity was not broken in His case if new results followed from this new combination of forces. The nature-miracles of the Gospel, accordingly, are evidences of the presence of a new power, and are not breaches of an old law.

CHAPTER X

THE EVIDENCE FOR THE MIRACLES : THE PAULINE EPISTLES

IN our previous chapters we have attempted to prove that miracles are not impossible in the abstract. We have now to consider the evidence we have for the Gospel miracles, which is to be found, in the four principal Epistles of St. Paul indirectly, and directly in the Evangelical memoirs themselves.

It is well to know at the beginning the proposition we have to establish, if we are to make any real headway in this controversy. In the first place, we surely have the liberty to point out that our religion is based on certain historical facts. It is to be emphasized in an age of shifting scenes and uncertain theories that our Church and its faith is not founded upon nebular hypotheses, but upon solid historical facts. Our religion goes back to a series of historic occurrences in a life lived like ours under the conditions of history. Our religion began with a Person Who said, and did, and suffered certain things; and for Whose existence at that particular time there is evidence as strong and as convincing as there is for the existence of the Emperor Tiberius Cæsar. Bishop Westcott warned¹ us against regarding the faith as merely an expression of intellectual conviction. It is matter of personal trust because it is first of all matter of history. "We believe in God, and we declare His nature by recounting what He has done in the limits of time and space. We do not attempt to describe His essence or His attributes in abstract language.

¹ *The Historic Faith*, p. 11 Macmillan, 1904.

We speak of His works, and through these we form in our human ways some conception of what He is. . . . No interpretation of these great facts is added. They belong to life. They are in themselves unchangeable. They stand before us for ever in their sublime majesty, part of the history of the world. They are unchangeable; but as the years teach us more of the conditions of our present existence, we see more of the Divine revelation which they convey." Our religion is, therefore, based upon historic facts. It is a historic fact itself, the greatest in history. For it has had greater influence upon the world during the past two thousand years, has filled a greater chapter in its annals, and occupies a more assured position in the world's life and thought than any empire ever founded by man. It would, indeed, be the greatest miracle man ever heard of, if such an institution was based upon the superstitious fancies of a few credulous dreamers and fanatics.

The Apostle Paul strikes the historic note. He spoke of the Resurrection as a concrete fact itself, not a theory invented to explain certain facts. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, the facts (1) that¹ Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and (2) that He was buried, and (3) that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and (4) that He was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve. After that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James, then of all the Apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, the untimely born." This is a long series of historic facts, the facts that had entered into St. Paul's life and conscience, and had changed

¹ *ὅτι* not "how that," A.V.

them and charged them with a great love, a glorious hope, and a mighty faith, facts as mysterious as they were historical.

Let us look for a moment at the writings of St. Paul.¹ With the exception of the Pastoral Epistles, which are still disputed, few of his other letters are open to serious doubt. Four of these, 1 Cor. (55 A.D.), 2 Cor. (56 A.D.), Romans (55-56 A.D.), and Gal. (50-55 A.D.),² are undisputed. They were written from twenty-one to twenty-seven years after the death of Jesus, that is, within the same generation. We find in them that a new phraseology of devotion had been created in that space of time, a new religious language, *e.g.*, "We are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, to show His righteousness." He speaks of himself as the "servant of Jesus Christ," "called an apostle of Jesus Christ," and as "a man in Christ."³

The peculiar thing about his references to Christ is that they are often more of a casual than of a deliberate and special nature. He is referring his readers to what Christians know well, and had known for years, and what was the ordinary equipment of a Christian presbyter or deacon of his day. He

¹ There is good external evidence for these Epistles. From the writings of Polycarp, who perished in the second century, we infer that a collection of Pauline letters was in use. Irenaeus, his pupil, most certainly had a copy of these similar to our own.

² The internal evidence is equally strong. The history implied in these Epistles fits into the history of the Acts of the Apostles, in all the more convincing manner because of its casual character.

³ In the personal note of these letters we have a still stronger proof that they were written by Paul, and not concocted by a forger,

assumes that they are acquainted with the ordinary curriculum of the faith. He emphasized the facts of the Passion and Resurrection, not because at that time "little interest was shown in the historical content of the Incarnation ;"¹ he made no references to the miracles and earlier events of the life of Jesus, not because "nobody cared to record the facts for their own sake."² He wrote when many of the personal followers of the Christ were living, when many of those who had seen the Risen Lord were still with them. He alludes to the Lord's teaching,³ to the institution of the Holy Communion,⁴ but incidentally,⁵ as to matters well known. He is conscious of the value of evidence. He refers by name to those who had seen the Lord, His own personal followers. They would be able to give further information regarding the Christ. But for himself the great facts of His Death for the sin of the world, and His Resurrection outweigh all else. They are for him the solution of the whole problem of the Incarnate Life, revealing its purpose and its accomplishment. Not that we are to suppose that St. Paul was indifferent to the facts of our Lord's life, St. Luke, his follower, being; probably under his direction, the most careful investigator and editor of perhaps the earliest 'sources' of the Gospels. Among these the accounts of Elisabeth's conception and Mary's conception were evidently based on perhaps the most "archaic"

¹ J. W. Thompson, *New Testament Miracles*, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14. ³ 1 Cor. vii. 10. ⁴ 1 Cor. xi.

⁵ In language, moreover, that implies that there was in the Church at that time the tradition of a discourse like that of John vi. on the Bread of Life. In the same way we have in the spiritual discourses of the Fourth Gospel on the unity of the disciples in Christ the Vine (John xv.-xvii.) a similar development of thought to that of "the Body of Christ" in the Pauline Epistles.

document of the faith.¹ We cannot say whether any considerable amount of the Synoptic work was at this time in a permanent form. But it is surely possible that a portion was.²

We again revert to the emphasis St. Paul placed upon the historical nature of the facts on which he built his faith. It was an historical Master Who lived, died, was buried, and rose again that he preached, One Whose rising was as real a fact as His death and burial, which were known to the Christians. No amount of theological colouring can obscure the basis of his writings and doctrine, the historic life, and divinity of Jesus of Nazareth Whom he had persecuted,³ Who is the Word of God. It is this that is the essence of Christianity, that distinguishes it from every form of Deism and Theism, and every scheme of morality and system of philosophy.

Yet even if we had no other record of the life of Jesus, we could assuredly gather from these Epistles of St. Paul that He was the most wonderfully gifted personality, the most remarkable spiritual power the world ever witnessed. How was it, we ask, that the persecutor of the Christ became the pioneer of His Gospel, unless there was the fact of Jesus of

¹ See Prof. Sanday's argument, "Virgin Birth of our Lord" in *Critical Questions*. "It is remarkable that St. Paul in Acts xxvi. 23 is the first to explain the Jewish language of the *Nunc Dimittis*, 'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.'"

² Prof. Sanday believes that "the great mass of the Synoptic Gospels had assumed its permanent shape not later than the decade A.D. 60-70 (*Jesus Christ*, Hastings's *D.B.*, II., 604). Surely we may believe that a portion of it was in writing in the previous decade, A.D. 50-60. W. C. Allen, in *Expository Times* (July, 1910), believes it probable that critical opinion will move to A.D. 60 as suggested by Harnack for Third Gospel, and to A.D. 50 for a Greek Second Gospel.

³ Acts. xxii. 8.

Nazareth behind it all? Yes, Jesus of Nazareth Whom he persecuted, and Who had revealed to him in such a way His Divine Origin and Nature that he who was ready to slay Him, if He were alive, and His adherents, now yearned to be slain for His name. If the Life and Passion of the Messiah is prophetically described in Isaiah liii, the character of Jesus of Nazareth is depicted in 1 Cor. xiii. It was Jesus Who suffered long and is kind, Who envied not, Who thought no evil, Who bore all things, hoped all things, believed all things, endured all things, and Who never failed. That summary of the characteristics of the Master is at least a proof that the facts of that Master's life and death were known to the Apostle who was "born out of due time."

Again, St. Paul appealed to the historical facts of spiritual gifts and miracles in the Church. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works."¹ He assumes that the people he wrote to were familiar with extraordinary manifestations of the apostolate.² He mentions "workings of miracles" (*ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων*) as well as "gifts of healings" (*χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων*) among the ordinary phenomena of the Spirit's presence in the Church.³ The latter may, indeed, be covered by cases of faith-healing and exorcism. The question is: Can 'workings of miracles' be reduced to similar phenomena? The word for 'miracle' is *δύναμις* 'power,' or 'act of power,' a word used of Philip's works in Samaria,⁴

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 12. *ἐν σημείοις καὶ τέρασι καὶ δυνάμεσι* exactly the expression used by St. Luke of our Lord in Acts ii. 22, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works, and wonders and signs." Cf. Rom. xv. 18, 19.

² See Acts ii. 43, "many wonders and signs (*τέρατα καὶ σημεία*) were done by the apostles." Cf. iv. 10; v. 12; xv 12 (of Paul and Barnabas).

³ 1 Cor. xii. 8-10.

⁴ Acts vii. 13.

and also of certain healings by contact with St. Paul's clothes,¹ which are called 'no ordinary miracles' (*δυνάμεις οὐ τὰς τυχεύσας*). It is possible, however, and probable that there is, after gifts of healing, exorcism, and other powers of that nature are removed, a certain residuum of "miracles" of a different character, even more wonderful in that age than they would be in ours, because they were not then understood or defined by the science of the day.² What these were we may infer from the frequent allusion to spiritual gifts and powers and the things of the Spirit in the Pauline Epistles. They evidently consisted of a powerful spiritual influence, exercised over the mind, and sometimes through the mind over the bodies of people by the Apostles when in an exalted spiritual state. The phenomenon of inspiration may help to explain this influence. Men in an exalted spiritual condition were capable of receiving a spiritual impression, a spiritual stimulus and a spiritual insight, which they could not receive in their ordinary state. They were likewise capable of imparting a similar spiritual impression, stimulus, and insight, when in the same exalted condition. We do not dream of saying that this is an adequate explanation of such spiritual phenomena which testified to the presence of the

¹ Acts xix. 11.

² Harnack's remark (*Das Wesen des Christentums*, S. 17) that there could be no miracle in the strict sense of the term in those days, *i.e.* a violation of the continuity of nature, can be perceived by no one who does not know what such continuity means, is of the nature of hair-splitting. The Jews of our Lord's day had experience to go upon, and even if they did not understand that that experience created the expectation of a similar uniformity in the future, they were not utterly devoid of reason, if they were not scientists, and they were well acquainted with the magical feats of sorcerers, from which they could easily distinguish the works of the Apostles.

Living Christ in the midst of His Church, but they merely represent a higher type of miracle than the phenomena of healing and exorcism to which Mr. Thompson would reduce the Gospel miracles.¹

St. Paul alludes quite calmly and casually to these astonishing results of his wonderful powers, which were always exercised for the propagation of the Gospel and for the edification of the Body of Christ. As he did not abuse his power, he did not misrepresent it. We, as we read his Epistles, feel that we are in contact with no ordinary mind, but one that was inspired, as no other man's ever was, by the Spirit of the Father and His Christ, to whom the spiritual life was an intense, a splendid reality. What must his influence in person have been, when his words have such power still over the hearts of men who are in a sufficiently exalted spiritual condition to appreciate them? If the works of St. Paul were of this extraordinary nature, if he knew, as he did, that he had the power through Christ, by Whose Name the apostles prayed in Acts iv. 30, that wonders and signs might be wrought, and apart from Whom our Lord said they could do nothing, what would he have thought of the deeds of his own Lord, in comparison with Whom he regarded Himself as a mere cipher, and Whose "slave" it was his proudest boast that he was, and of Whom he said, "I have strength for all things in Christ Who endueth (ἐνδυναμοῦντι) me with power?"² Surely if Paul possessed wonderful power over the spirit, and through the spirit over the body of man, his Master possessed far greater. When his "signs" were only the "signs" of a servant, what must the "signs" of the Master have been? He says nothing of them, not passing over them in scornful silence, but because he was lost in amazement at

¹ *Loc. cit.* p. 20.

² Phil. iv. 13.

the greater miracle that Jesus was Himself, because his reason fell down and worshipped before the transcendent miracle of the Incarnation from which the other miracles were derived, and soared aloft to the crowning miracle of the Resurrection to which the others led. The miracle to him was His Master's act of condescension in emptying Himself of His glory and power and taking the form of a servant, not His Transfiguration or His Ascension, which were only suitable and appropriate episodes in His existence.¹

The man who desires to retain his faith in such a transcendently good and great Personality as the Christ of history, and to reject the miracles which are associated with Him in the records of that history, must find himself in a dilemma. For he must either accept or reject the whole history. If he doubts the miraculous element, must he not equally doubt the ordinary narrative, through the tissue of which that element runs like a connecting thread? Can he be convinced of the beauty of the Divine Life if he is not assured of the truth of its presentation? Can he be intellectually a sceptic and spiritually a believer? Surely a man divided against himself cannot stand. His only safety is to hold fast to the historic Christ, to cling to Christianity as an historic religion based on that historic Christ, even if he finds it impossible to believe in any breach in the continuity of nature. However convinced a man is that miracles do not happen, he must in justice to himself examine the claims of One, and weigh the evidence concerning One Who demands his own heart's allegiance in the words: "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And he will doubtless find, if he is unbiased and approaches the subject

¹ Phil. ii. 5-8.

reverently and humbly, that Christ has revealed a higher spiritual life than man ever dreamt of or that has entered in the heart of man to conceive, and that He was Himself in His life and conduct the highest ideal, the perfect standard,¹ and the supreme inspiration for man. Of Him Rénan well said, "Whatever may be the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed." And the greatest fact of all—the most difficult for the sceptic to explain, and the most natural for the disciple to accept—was this, that the men of His own generation worshipped Him, prayed to Him, and regarded Him as the Wisdom and the Power and the Word of God. The reason of this was doubtless because they considered Him to be in the purity, goodness and beauty of His life, in the authority and grandeur of His words, in the compassion and nobility of His deeds, in the sublimity and self-sacrifice of His sufferings, in His indescribable love for the Father and for man, in His splendid reserve and His no less splendid revelation, something superhuman, something Divine, yea, the true Representative, the Express Image, of the invisible God, full of grace and truth. In Him Deity was made manifest to their souls. He was and is the kind of God humanity needs. It has been well said that "If Christ, His Person, His Mission, His Work, is real, if the story told by the Evangelists is substantially true, then in it is found the best evidence for the existence of God. The God Whom science tells us is unknowable is revealed in Jesus, the Christ." If a man does not bow in homage to the type of character manifested in Jesus, he will

¹ As acknowledged by John Stuart Mill in the well-known words, "Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in fastening on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."

not be convinced of His Divinity by any proofs of His pre-existence or omnipotence. Does not the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels correspond with our idea of what God is in His relations to men? When we try, however imperfectly, to realize Him in His life and dealings with men, do His works strike a discordant note? Are they not rather in harmony with the glorious melody of His great mission, in which a divine note is ever and anon sounded? His Divine Personality shines out in His every word and work. It seems natural to such a One to be the Lord of nature and the Master of men, to rule the storm and the waves, to banish sin and expel disease from human life. Such a Personality can owe nothing to legend or exaggeration. Its greatness consists in its simplicity as much as in its sublimity. We know what sort of a person legend could create, and how it could distort the Divine by its rash attempt to portray it.¹

Writing of these Gospel miracles, Prof. Harnack² says, "Who can say how far the influences of soul upon soul, and of soul upon body reach? No one. Who dare even maintain that every extraordinary phenomenon that occurs in this province rests on deception and error? Assuredly miracles do not happen, but there is much of the wonderful and the inexplicable. Because we know this to-day, we have become more cautious, more reserved in our judgments of the miraculous narratives of ancient origin. That the lame walked, the blind saw,

¹ In the Apocryphal Gospels some fifty miracles are ascribed to Christ which are not mentioned in the Canonical Gospels, and how petty, trivial, wanting in dignity, sympathy, and moral and spiritual significance, and how inferior they are in every way to the miracles of the Gospels! Such are the miracles men invent, even in a good cause and from a good motive.

² *Das Wesen des Christentums*, S. 18, 19.

the deaf heard we cannot dismiss as illusion." He proceeds to advise the students who were present at his lectures to study the Gospels. "We must not shelter ourselves behind the miraculous story in order to escape the Gospel. Study these narratives, and be not repelled from them by this or that miraculous story. If you find anything unintelligible, put it quietly to one side. Perhaps it may dawn on you later with an unexpected meaning. But be not repelled. The question of miracles is something relatively indifferent in comparison with everything else in the Gospels. We are not concerned with miracles, but with the decisive question whether we are to be bound helplessly to a ruthless necessity, or whether there is a God Whose nature-compelling Force can be implored and experienced."

That question surely has been settled for men for ever by Jesus Christ, Who revealed God as the Father in His own life, and appealed to human hearts to trust and love that Father; and Who made manifest that Father in Himself, in a manner no Being of pure deity could have done. He won us by His humanity to believe in His divinity. This seems to settle the question of "Jesus or Christ?" It was as Jesus of Nazareth that He broke the stubborn heart of Saul of Tarsus, saying, "I am Jesus of Nazareth Whom thou persecutest," and led him on to see in Him the transcendent majesty of a God. This is why St. Paul's evidence is so valuable and is so hard for our opponents to break down.

Speaking of the Personality of Christ we find portrayed in the Gospels, the German professor says, "In this consciousness He knows Himself to be the Son of God, and therefore He can say, 'My God and My Father,' and He puts into this address something which belongs to Him alone. How He came to this consciousness of the unique

character of His relation as a Son, how He came to the consciousness of His power and duty and mission, that is His secret, and no psychology will ever fathom it. . . He is certain that He knows the Father, that He must bring this knowledge to all, and that He is doing the work of God. Among all the works of God this is the greatest ; it is the aim and purpose of creation. The work is given Him to do, and He will carry it out in the Father's strength. It was out of this sense of power and in the prospect of victory that He said, ' All things are committed to Me by My Father.'

" Other messengers and prophets have come forward with the consciousness of having a divine message, but the message was always imperfect, and the messenger seldom proved to be an example of his message. But in this case the profoundest and most comprehensive kind of message was brought ; it reached the very roots of humanity, and although set in the framework of the Jewish nation, it addressed itself to the whole of humanity—the message from God the Father. And He Who delivered it has yielded place to no man, and even to-day gives an aim and meaning to human life—He the Son of God."

A nobler tribute to the work, position and personality of Christ could hardly be found even in the writings of His truest disciples. Before the moral miracle of that Personality which stands out in a veritable blaze of glory from the miraculous narrative the great critic grows eloquent, but the devout Christian falls on his knees and adores with St. Paul.

CHAPTER XI

THE EVIDENCE FOR THE MIRACLES : THE GOSPELS

WE shall now consider the evidence for miracles in the Gospels. At the outset we are obliged to determine whether the Gospels are sufficiently trustworthy to constitute good evidence for such strange happenings as they relate. We shall, accordingly, ask Professor Harnack, one of the greatest of modern critics, who has examined the question dispassionately, without any theological presuppositions or prepossessions, what his verdict is. In his book on the *Essence of Christianity*,¹ he sets himself to answer the question, "What is Christianity?" and says that it is purely in the historical sense that he attempts to answer it, that is, with the methods of historical science, and with the knowledge of human life gained by actual experience.² He thus excludes from his investigation all religious and philosophical considerations and assumptions. The words of such a critic on the Gospels, which have been so frequently impugned and vilified, must carry weight even with those who do not accept their revelation. "Sixty years ago,"—that would be about 1840—he writes,³ "David Strauss believed he had destroyed the historical nature of the three first Gospels as well as the fourth. The historical criticism of two generations has succeeded in restoring that historical character in its

¹ *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Lectures before the University of Berlin, 1899-1900.

² *Ibid.*, S. 4. Reference to German Edition.

³ *Ibid.*, S. 14.

main outlines. . . . The unique character of the Gospels is universally recognised by criticism. The Greek language lies only like a transparent veil upon those writings, whose contents can with little trouble be translated back into Hebrew or Aramaic. That we have here in the main a primary tradition is unmistakable."

His verdict is that "Strauss' contention that the Gospels contained much that is 'mythical' has not been established."¹

There are many like Dr. Harnack who do not approach with antagonistic presuppositions as Strauss did, but with reverence, the study of the Gospels. They are impressed with the wonderful teaching and the remarkable portrait of the greatest human Personality to be found in history. They acknowledge Him as the greatest Master of men, and, in a sense, the Lord of humanity. They admit that the evidence for many of His works of healing is strong, that it is most probable they were wrought, but they explain them according to modern psychical science as due to the wonderful influence of His personality upon the minds, and through the minds over the bodies, of men. They pass over His other works, and ignore the marvellous circumstances of His Incarnation and Resurrection. How are we to meet such?

Of course, those of us who believe in and love our Master Christ with all our soul, and can realise His presence and power in our own lives most vividly and graciously, have in our own hearts an argument which is more convincing to us than any other we could imagine, and with which Ritschlianism may not quarrel. But this argument is largely subjective. It is, however, objective in the sense that we are Christ's "epistles," to be read and known of

¹ *Ibid.*, S. 16.

all men as followers of Christ. It is to be observed in this connection that if there were no Gospels at all, the Gospel which was preached before those were written, and which was blessed unto the saving of souls, would still be preached and would be equally efficacious. The influence of the Divine Spirit is independent of written documents. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself."¹ The results of that Divine influence in changing the current of the world's history; in establishing human life upon a firmer, purer, higher basis; in raising the social environment and ideals of mankind, are largely due to the religious convictions of men who found this witness to Christ in their own heart, and would gladly have laid down their lives for Him.

The miracle of that wonderful influence is inexplicable on natural methods; and it is a miracle that is still with us. We can test it; we can appeal to it, we who have experienced the influence of that Divine Personality, His sweetness, His consoling power, His spiritual beauty in our own lives. The monks of olden days believed, as we have already seen, that, by gazing intently upon the crucifix, the very wounds, the stigmata,² of Christ would come into their own hands and feet and sides. It was a crude realism which covered the beautiful idea that as men gaze with faith upon the Christ the features of His Divine Character imprint themselves upon their hearts. This is an historical fact.

Accordingly, Christianity does not stand or fall with the Gospels. It existed before them, it could exist without them. Let this be remembered: that Christianity, the power of Christ, the influence of His Divine Personality, the energy of His Divine

¹ 1 John v. 10—reading *αὐτῷ* for *αὐτῶ* "him."

² Whence *stigmatisation*, the name for marks (*stigmata*) alleged to be produced by hypnotism on the body.

Spirit are independent of everything that lies in the hands of man to injure. These *Gesta Christi*¹ are historical facts, and yet are also miraculous phenomena which no naturalistic hypothesis can explain. These are the facts that convince us that the Master we worship is a Risen Lord, One Who could control not merely the virulent force of disease in the body and the baneful cancer of sin in the soul, but Who could and did rule the waves and the storms. The splendid fact that our Lord was crucified for us, was buried and rose again, which is commemorated in the Eucharist of His Church which shall never cease until He comes again, is the living basis on which the Church was built, the historic foundation of an historic creed, that would surely have been handed down from father to son to our own day, even if a single page of the Gospels had never been written.

But whether this argument appeals or not to others, we must answer their question regarding the trustworthiness of the Gospels which contain the accounts of the miracles to which they have taken exception. And we can approach this question without any anxiety because we have seen that the determination of dates and other such literary matters cannot affect the security of the vital facts on which the Church is founded.

There is good reason to believe that the Gospels are historically genuine works. Their dates are not seriously disputed² even if their contents be not

¹ Well described in Brace's *Gesta Christi*.

² There were other Gospels, but the mind of the Church would not accept them. A brief glance at them will show how different they are. They soon fell into disuse, and were never generally accepted. They show the difference between the ideas of a later age, to which German criticism used to assign the true Gospels, and the ideas of the Apostolic age and generation.

accepted. Severer tests have been applied to them by the critics than any work of Greek or Latin literature could sustain. The manuscripts of Euripides belong to the fourteenth century, those of Aischylos and Sophocles depend on the Medicean manuscript of the tenth century, but for the Gospel, in addition to a large number of splendid manuscripts, we have two MSS. of the fourth century, the Sinaitic (α) and the Vatican (β). Furthermore, from that century onwards, we have a vast number of manuscript copies and versions of the Gospels. Moreover, the Gospels are abundantly quoted by all the writers from the middle of the second century, especially Irenaeus (150–200), so that there is no doubt that these are the very books that were read and regarded as the Canonical Gospels of Christ by the ancient Churches of Rome, Lugdunum, Alexandria and Carthage.

The Gospels were anonymous writings, but they were attributed by the early voice of the Church to Apostles and apostolic men. There are not four Gospels, but only one. In our oldest manuscripts they are treated as if they had but one title, the Gospel. St. Luke's Gospel is evidently by the same hand that wrote the Acts, a fellow-traveller of St. Paul. This is admitted by Harnack. It was written for the further instruction of a Gentile convert, Theophilus, and was expressly founded upon the work of "*eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word.*" Harnack puts the date between 78 and 93, but Dean Robinson,¹ shortly after 70. St. Mark's Gospel is the earliest of all. There is some reason, as Professor Swete remarks, for believing that the Second Gospel was known to the Church as the "*Memoirs of Peter,*" before it came to be called the Gospel according to St. Mark.² The Gospel

¹ *The Study of the Gospels*, p. 13. ² *Critical Questions*, p. 33.

bears, indeed, many a trace of St. Peter in its vividness and freshness, which suggest that it is the work of an eyewitness. If the three Gospels are printed in parallel columns, it will be seen that almost every section of St. Mark is found in the other two, and that the order and phraseology of St. Mark is preserved in one or the other of the two. The Second Gospel was accordingly written before St. Luke's, probably before the fall of Jerusalem. Dr. Harnack gives as its probable date 65-70. In the other Gospels we also find traces of older documents which St. Luke ostensibly employed. The parables of the Lost Son, etc., which are a distinctive feature of this Gospel, bear the impress of one supreme master-mind, and show that he had access to some "source," original but unknown to the other Evangelists. St. Matthew's Gospel would appear to be founded upon a collection of sayings of a Jewish-Palestinian tendency, and which may be, and most probably is, the *Logia* written in the Hebrew dialect which Papias, and after him Irenaeus, Origen and Eusebius attributed to the Apostle Matthew.¹ The data furnished by the Gospel itself seem best satisfied if we suppose that its author compiled it within a period of a few years before or after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.² Dr. Harnack gives the date "probably 70-75," "except later additions." The date of

¹ This tradition must have some foundation. But the First Gospel as we have it is manifestly based upon St. Mark as one of its sources. It cannot be the *Logia* referred to, for it was written in Greek, not in Hebrew, as its borrowings from the Greek of St. Mark's Gospel show. It has been suggested that the name of Matthew was extended from the Hebrew *Logia* which the Apostle wrote to the Gospel which embodied that collection of sayings.—W. C. Allen, *Gospel according to St. Matthew*, p. lxxx. *et seq.*

² *Ibid.*, p. lxxxiv.

the Fourth Gospel he gives as "not after 110 and not before 80." With regard to that Gospel Dean Robinson says,¹ "We have then in the securest tradition of the Apostle's later life just those conditions which appear to be suggested by the phenomena of the Gospel itself: an old man, disciplined by long labour and suffering, surrounded by devoted scholars, recording before he passes from them his final conception of the life of Christ, as he looked back upon it in the light of fifty years of Christian experience."

Such is the evidence for the trustworthiness of the Gospel, such is the view of recent critics whose learning and ability entitle them to be heard on this subject, both of whom started from diametrically opposite points of view, and yet found themselves in agreement with regard to the principal positions as to dates and authenticity.

With regard to interpretation, we are bound to differ with all who consider that Jesus was not an infallible authority. This is, after all, the question we have to face. It is an evasion of the issue for men to assert that they mean, in saying they cannot believe in a "verbally infallible Jesus," that it is in an "infallibly reported Jesus" that they cannot believe, as was said at the Church Congress, 1913. The Gospels being documents, in the composition of which human ability and accuracy and carefulness were employed,² are not of course as perfect as if they had been composed by infallible critics. But the evident reason of their composition, to secure the "certainty" concerning the things which men had been taught by word of mouth,³ is surely a good ground for believing that they were faithful and honest reports, without prejudice and exaggeration, of the things that had so far been preached and

¹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 152. ² St. Luke i. 3. ³ κατηχήθης, Luke i. 4.

believed by the Christian Church. The writer of the Third Gospel does not refer to any special inspiration that kept him from mistakes in matters of detail, but he appeals to the fact that he had followed up the course of this history to its original *sources* (*ἀνωθεν*), i.e., to the reports of eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, and with accuracy (*ἀκριβώς*).¹ It was to be expected that there would be discrepancies in matters of detail between the writers. This would disprove collusion, and establish independence and veracity. No two persons could, humanly speaking, describe the same occurrences which they had seen with their own eyes in the same words. They would be bound to differ in many details, while agreeing in the main points. Otherwise their story would be rightly suspected as concocted.

It is also probable that we have in the Gospels not only the facts and teaching of our Lord, but also the explanations and interpretations that were put upon them by the earliest Church teachers. Chief among these is a list of testimonies from the Old Testament, which was no doubt of the greatest use to the first preachers to prove that the prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled by Christ, and which was laid under contribution in the First Gospel.

The Gospels represent faithfully the local colouring, political situation and religious problems of the day, whenever they touch upon them, and are wonderfully free from anachronisms and blunders in their description of the environment of our Lord's life and the incidents of His work and Passion. They have a strong claim, accordingly, to be regarded as trustworthy witnesses. But there is one thing that outweighs everything that has been

¹ Luke i. 3.

urged in support of their credibility with some people, and that is the fact that they contain reports of miracles. This is explained by the theory that the writers were ignorant¹ men and inclined to exaggerate ordinary events, and manufacture miracles out of them.² Now there is a certain tendency to create myths in human nature. But such a creation requires an interval of time. Here there is no time-interval. We have seen that the Incarnation and Resurrection were believed as early as 55 A.D. Moreover, myths grow. Here there is no growth. The theology of St. Paul is as deep as that of St. John. Accordingly, the best critics have rejected the mythical hypothesis as absurd. Again, it requires imagination and credulity. But here we do not find either. The age of our Lord was far from being an age of ignorance or superstition. There was considerable culture in Galilee and Judæa. The Scribes represented the learning, and the Sadducees the scepticism of Jewish society, while the Stoics and Epicureans of the Roman world were by no means inclined to believe in

¹ St. Peter and St. John are described by the Jews as unlearned and ignorant men. But St. Paul (2 Cor. xi. 6) described himself as rude (a layman *ἰδιώτης*, whence "idiot"), that is, not professional.

² Dr. Harnack's group of miracles in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, S. 19, are: (1) Miraculous narratives due to the exaggeration of natural but impressive occurrences; (2) miraculous narratives which arose out of sayings and parables, or from the projection of inner experiences into the external world; (3) such as arose from the desire to see Old Testament prophecies fulfilled; (4) surprising works of healing performed by the spiritual power of Jesus; (5) the inexplicable (*undurchdringliches*).

Professor Sanday mentions three critical expedients for the elimination of miracle: (1) Imitation of similar stories in the Old Testament; (2) exaggeration of natural occurrences; (3) translation of what was originally parable into external fact—(*Jesus Christ*, Hastings's D. B., p. 625).

spiritual phenomena. While it was a time of great material splendour, it was a time of intellectual pessimism and doubt. The lower orders of both races were of course ready to believe miraculous stories which were connected with their religion. But here was something that ran counter to all their traditional beliefs and preconceived opinions. Did they show a predisposition to accept it without evidence? The Gospels tell a different story. Their candour in this respect is a mark of their veracity. They tell frequently of opposition to His Divine claims, of doubts of the Christ, not only among the people,¹ but also among His own disciples,² the very men who afterwards preached the Gospel of the Incarnation and Resurrection. We also read of doubts in the Corinthian Church concerning the resurrection of the dead.

So far we have failed to discover any predisposition in favour of the great historic facts of the Life of Christ, His Incarnation and His Resurrection, among His own personal followers, who immediately after His Ascension proclaimed Him as their Risen Lord and Master, the Word of Life, the Son of the Father, and prayed to Him as their Intercessor with that Father. Is their evidence to be rejected as manufactured, as due to the gradual growth and materialization of ideas of what the Messiah should be and do?

But why, men ask, cannot the miraculous element be eliminated from the Gospels? We answer: Would that increase their trustworthiness? If the

¹ John v. 18; viii. 58; x. 33.

² John vi. 66: "Upon this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Cf. John xx. 24-29, Luke xxiv. 25, 26: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe: Behoved it not the Christ to suffer, and to enter into His glory?"

Gospels cannot be trusted to give a fairly accurate portrait of the Christ ; if that sublime Teacher, that human Lord, that great Shepherd Who died to save His sheep, that Divine Saviour Who invited the weary, Who came to save sinners, Who saved others but Who would not save Himself, Who would have the children brought to Him to be blessed, and yet Who lived as an itinerant preacher on terms of intimacy with His disciples, Who was " meek and lowly of heart," Who refused a crown, and Who only revealed Himself by degrees as the Son of Man—if that picture is not drawn from the life, whence is it ? Not surely from the popular Jewish expectations of His own day, much less from the rationalism of a later age.

If men would only stand and gaze before that Divine Figure of the Gospels, and let it grow upon their mind, their soul, and their heart, then let them ask themselves, would they not rejoice to know that such an One, Who gave such a glorious ideal of hope and inspiration to human life, had conquered death and all its powers, and was still able to save them from sin and death ? Would it increase the trustworthiness of the narrative, its appeal to the heart and intelligence of humanity, if that central and saving Figure of the Gospel were stripped of all the mystery and the glory and the grace and the power that were His as the Son of God ? Miracles form so large a part of His programme that we cannot regard them as due to the imagination of His own or a succeeding generation without destroying not only the credibility of the documents, but also the reality of His own personality. We cannot throw discredit upon the miraculous stories without injuring the Gospel, which was never non-miraculous.

St. Mark's Gospel is the earliest of the four, and

the thread of the supernatural runs through the whole tissue of it. No human art can draw out that thread without ruin to the whole fabric. We must either reject the rest of the narrative with the marvellous stories or accept those stories with the rest of the narrative.

The experience of Professor Ramsay may be usefully referred to here. "Twenty years ago," he says, "I found it easy to dispose of the miraculous stories, but nowadays probably not even the youngest amongst us can maintain that we have mastered the secrets of Nature, and determined the limits that divide the unknown from the possible."¹

There are people, however, who are not satisfied to have the question settled in this way. They are not willing to admit that the Gospels are untrustworthy, and yet they are loath to accept miracles. They believe that they have found a way out of the difficulty by distinguishing between miracles of healing and cosmic miracles which were performed upon nature. In this way they are able to accept a great deal of helpful teaching, which they would otherwise have to reject. But does this distinction really dispose of the difficulty? Is there greater documentary evidence for the miracles that were wrought upon intelligent subjects than for those that were performed upon or in connection with inanimate matter? This cannot be answered in the affirmative. As we look casually at the Synoptic Gospels, we notice in the first place a considerable amount of matter common to the three. That we may call the Triple Synopsis. Secondly, we observe a great deal of matter consisting principally of discourses with a few narratives common to the First and Third. That we may call the Double Synopsis. There is a considerable residuum peculiar

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 87.

to each of these Gospels, notably the parables of the Lost in Luke and the fulfilment texts in the First, and the double-tradition of the Infancy, which are evidently from different sources in both Gospels.

It is plain that the matter which is recorded in all three represents the primary source of the Gospels, whether oral or written. It has the greatest authority of all. Then comes the matter which is recorded in two of the Synoptists. Now, if the easier miracles are found distributed through the Triple Synopsis, and the harder miracles only in the Double Synopsis or in the matter peculiar to each Evangelist, there would be some reason for attaching more credence to the narratives containing the former class of miracles than to those which reported the other class. But we do not find this to be the case. In the threefold narratives we find not only cures of paralysis, but that Jesus calms the wind and the sea,¹ He brings to life the daughter of Jairus,² He feeds five thousand people with a few loaves and fish.³ This is also found in the Fourth Gospel.⁴ It is also to be mentioned that the feeding of the four thousand occurs in Mark⁵ and Matthew,⁶ and was not, therefore, likely to be a duplicate at that stage, but probably belonged to the original source, like the other. This brings us back even behind the original source, to a time when, assuming that the critics are correct in their assertion that we have a duplicate here, that doubling might have been made, so that even behind the original source we have a nature-miracle. Accordingly, the distribution of the miracles does not support the distinction made. The evidence for all classes of

¹ Mark iv. 35 ; Matt. viii. 23-27 ; Luke viii. 22-25.

² Mark v. 35 ; Matt. ix. 23-26 ; Luke viii. 49-56.

³ Mark vi. 35 ; Matt. xiv. 13-21 ; Luke ix. 10-17 ;
John vi. 1-14. ⁴ vi. ⁵ viii. ⁶ xv.

miracles is the same. In fact, there is equally strong documentary evidence for those miracles which appear to be greater violations of natural law as for those which show the least deviation therefrom.

Mr. Thompson admits that these stories¹ are "simple and straightforward, with some signs of first-hand evidence, and comparatively little trace of evidential motive. It is difficult to resist the impression that they are based on genuine reminiscences of the disciples." Yet he seeks for a non-miraculous explanation of them all, and labours to show how these incidents, which "belong to the enthusiastic days of the Galilean ministry," were transformed into marvels. He asks us to believe that the storm which arose naturally subsided as naturally into perfect calm; that Jairus' daughter was only in a cataleptic trance; that the feeding of the five thousand was simply the conversion of a parable, in which Jesus compared His teaching to miraculous food that satisfies all and never diminishes, into actual fact. He finds the clue to the narrative in the institution of the Eucharist, "which might sometimes be held out of doors." "Further, it was natural to think that if He had performed this symbolic act once in Jewish territory, He must have done it again among the Gentiles, and thus the alternative tradition of the feeding of the four thousand found ready admission to the Gospel." "It is difficult," he concludes,² "to see why, unless there was some such ecclesiastical motive for its preservation, the story of this miracle should have appeared six times in the Gospels, and always with such an amount of detail. The fact that it is so often described is not a sign that the

¹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 41., i.e., of the calming of the sea, restoring the daughter of Jairus, feeding the Five Thousand, walking on the lake.

² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Evangelists were particularly sure that it happened, but rather that it was particularly appropriate to the needs of those for whom they wrote."

This is a view of the Evangelists and their work with which we have been made familiar in the writings of Unitarians, Agnostics, and advanced writers of the Modernist School. The brilliant discovery of a motive "for the elaboration of miracle-stories in the theological, devotional and ecclesiastical interests" of the generation for whom the Gospels were written, and which were "dominant considerations in the minds of the men who compiled the Gospels,"¹ puts a new aspect upon the whole subject under discussion. And when the work of that motive in "the formation of the Gospel stories as they now stand" is supplemented by "the tendency to transform natural events into supernatural, the love of assimilation, the ease with which an editor can give a new turn to a passage,"² we have assuredly the whole explanation of the Gospel records in our hands! We are amazed at the simplicity of it!

But do we wonder that the Church, which has heard similar stories from the days of the first Agnostics until the present time, has not been converted to this view, and abandoned the miraculous, the supernatural, the spiritual, in exchange for the non-miraculous, the natural and the material? The answer is always the same, that the Church cannot be persuaded to believe that the present form of the Gospel narratives is due to the imagination and the dishonesty of the disciples of the Christ. When she is convinced that such has been the case, then, no doubt, she will hasten to reconsider the question, and commit the "reconsideration of the original non-miraculous facts" to those scribes

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

who have already warned us of the mistakes that have been made and the changes that have come through the zeal or stupidity of a long series of scribes. She will doubtless call in the assistance of those rationalists who have so conspicuously failed to give a rational explanation of the origin and endowment of man on the natural principles which the world would only accept,¹ and who have even more conspicuously failed to give a rational explanation of the origin and endowment of the Church, through regarding the miracles of the Gospel as purely natural incidents. Nor will she refuse the valuable aid of those profound critics who imagined that they had reduced the Gospel narratives to a collection of myths founded on the stories of the Old Testament or invented to fulfil prophecies, but whose own contributions to the question have been cast contemptuously aside along with the myths,² more venerable but not less irrational, of antiquity by a more modern school of thought.

In the meantime, the Church would ask her children who are in any doubt about the miracles of the Gospel to remember that there is strong evidence for the most marvellous of these miraculous events one generation after they are said to have happened, and that the probabilities are that they formed the subject of lectures, discourses, and instruction years before that. If they are not yet satisfied, she advises them to suspend their

¹ Alfred Russel Wallace, while admitting that man as an animal is developed by natural selection, which he shares with Darwin the credit of discovering, did not consider man as an intellectual and moral being to be so developed. He upheld the necessity of postulating some other influence, some spiritual influx, to account for man's mental and psychic nature in his essays on *Natural Selection* (1870).

² Harnack shows how Strauss's views are rejected to-day — *Das Wesen des Christentums*, S. 16.

judgment, and to put their difficulties to one side with prayer for light and guidance, and to consider the miracle of the Incarnate Christ. Then, perhaps, the day may dawn when they shall find the answer to their doubt in the Life of Him, Who resisted from the first the temptation to put forth His Divine power in order to satisfy idle curiosity and to make this world wonder by doing deeds in which His Father's will would not be realised nor His Father's heart revealed, but Whose wonderful works, in aim, purpose, and sublimity, are wonderfully unlike many of those that have been attributed to Him by the mythological, literary, and symbolical methods¹ of the Apocryphal writers, who did invent miracle-stories which, unlike the Gospel miracles, are proved false from internal evidence, and have absolutely no external evidence, and are, accordingly, incredible.

NOTE ON THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND.

Dr. Sanday follows Mr. Thompson in regarding the event in the story as "a consecrated meal." He holds that there were many such meals and that they led up to the Last Supper. He says, "I believe with Schweitzer that the substance of the story is all historical, except the one phrase 'and they were all filled' (with the details which go with it). This preternatural filling is the only addition. I have little doubt that it comes from the stories of multiplied food in the O.T. narratives of Elijah and Elisha, and especially from the story of the man of Baal-Shalishah, in 2 Kings iv. 42-4," (p. 25). This seems to us to empty the story of "genuine historical matter."

¹ See following chapter.

CHAPTER XII

THE CRITICS' DILEMMA—THE GOSPELS, TRUE OR FALSE

AMONG the "four distinct methods of interpretation" of how the Gospel narratives came into their present form Mr. Thompson mentions the Rationalistic, the Mythological, the Literary, and the Symbolical. This implies in plain language that in the Gospels we have either a legendary, a mythical, or a fictitious element. Now, a legendary element would be due to an exaggerated tradition of past events converted into marvels by frequent repetition, according to the principle that a story never loses in the telling. A mythical element would be the result of deliberate invention on the part of men more or less gifted with imagination, in order to impart some semblance of reality to their ideas. And a fictitious element would be the result of the falsehood and forgery, pious or impious, of men who desired to make others believe them for their own purposes.

None of these explanations can satisfy the requirements of this case. For the legendary theory must assume that the events the writer describes are in a remote past, and have been obtained in a roundabout and uncritical manner. This has been found not to be possible in the case of the miracle-narratives in the Gospels. The writers are separated at most by fifty years from the events they record during which time the Church was being rapidly, extended and spiritually edified, but during which time we can trace no development of the original "legend," if such it was. This is not the way with legends. They increase and multiply. It is

remarkable, too, that the Gospel "legend" has overlooked the first thirty years of our Lord's life—a most tempting field for legend, as the Apocryphal writers, who tried to fill up the gap with their own inventions, found. On the contrary, the Gospel miracles belong to the year or years of His public ministry, when public attention was focussed upon Him and His work, and when there was no lack of contemporaneous testimony, which might have well been both adverse and destructive, for aught the compilers of the Gospel "legends" might have known. Whether we call it, politely, with Mr. Thompson, "embroidery," "elaboration," "tendency to exaggerate," or "symbolism," it is a recognized fact that there must be some residuum of truth, some real basis in fact, in a legend. But there is absolutely none in a myth in which we have the use of fiction, not to dress up a fact, but to adorn a fancy utterly devoid of reality. Accordingly, the objectors, who in the present day are too wary to lay emphasis openly on the theory of deliberate fraud, which is really one of the horns of the critical dilemma with which they are faced, are bound to demonstrate that the writers were separated from the events they record by a distance of time sufficiently great to allow the residuum of non-miraculous fact, which they graciously admit, to blossom forth into an attractive and picturesque legend. They can only obtain this time by post-dating the Gospels as much as possible. But here the best qualified critics have, as we have seen, firmly drawn the line, and have put an unexpected but a much needed restraint upon the fertility and the stretch of the imagination of these hostile writers. Let them show that during the fifty years they are conceded, on the basis of non-miraculous fact or facts was built up a superstructure of mythology, allegory,

symbolism, literary transformation, terminological inexactitude—in a word, fiction. Let them show that not only the writers or editors had so complete a disregard for that basal fact, but that every single member of the Church conspired with them during that fifty years—a space of time which does not allow an ordinary man's memory to play him false, at any rate on important matters—to superadd the miracles of the Incarnation and Resurrection to an ordinary human birth and an ordinary human death, in order to explain the rise of a *living* Church, and an active propaganda, which did not require such additions to make good its case. If the Church existed before these miraculous circumstances were invented or elaborated—as they must allow—it could surely have existed without them. They did it no service, and they could have been very well done without. The invention of these miracles to explain the origin and growth of a living Church was surely an act of supererogation, a waste of time and imagination, on the part of these editors and writers. In fact, it was an act both irrational and absurd.

Such is the *reductio ad absurdum* to which these critics of the Gospels bring, not those sacred records, but their own theory. For does not a theory, that postulates such a gross act of absurdity on the part of those whose case it seeks to demolish, expose itself to a forcible *tu quoque*?

But this is not all; they have got to prove that the sketch, the portrait of the most perfect character ever known to man, and acknowledged even by sceptics¹ to be the Ideal Man, Who was not like

¹ John Stuart Mill wrote: "Nor even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve his life."

the wise man of the Stoics, a creature of imagination, but a real living and loving and beloved Personality, not only stands forth from a background of unreal and fictitious colouring, but also that it owes its own harmonious beauty and Godlike proportions to the attempts of certain editors to "embroider" certain stories, in order to advance certain ecclesiastical interests, in a word, to that party spirit¹ which is described by St. Paul as a work of the flesh in contradistinction to the fruit of the Spirit. In Phil. i. 16, St. Paul tells us that some preach Christ of contention, that is, make Him a subject of such party motives as are here attributed to the writers of the Gospels. His verdict on their work is summed up in two words, "not purely or sincerely." What would St. Paul's verdict be of the editors of the Gospels, if they were actuated by the desire to advance their cause at all costs, without regard to veracity or love? Would it not be the same—"Not purely?"

There is another point worthy of the consideration of our critics. They assert that St. Matthew and St. Luke "improved" the Gospel of St. Mark. In summing up his remarks on the evidence of St. Matthew, Mr. Thompson writes,² "We conclude that what is new in this Gospel (so far as miracles are concerned) is generally less trustworthy than what is old, and that what is old is less trustworthy here than in its original form in Mark. The crux of the question is still the evidence of St. Mark."³ His summary of St. Luke's evidence is similar. "It does not appear that in his omissions from, or editing of the Marcan tradition, St. Luke is guided (except perhaps in a very few cases) by any new evidence. The authority for this group of

¹ ἐπιθελᾶ, Gal. v. 20 ; ἐξ ἐπιθελᾶς, Phil. i. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

miracles, then, after all the changes through which they have passed in the hands of St. Matthew and St. Luke, remains St. Mark." ¹

Now, if it be true that the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke are intentional improvements of the second and original Gospel, it would appear that their improved versions did not lead to the desired end, the superseding of the Second Gospel by the later Gospels. On the contrary, to us it seems that their incorporation of the Marcan Gospel in theirs was with the intent to preserve that tradition along with other important material ; and this they succeeded in doing. They did not find it deficient in the miraculous element, for the Marcan tradition contains both health-restoring and cosmic miracles, but they were able to supplement it with apostolic matter which the Church desired to have preserved for the edification and instruction of her children. If the conscience of the Christian Church was itself so purblind as not to be able to distinguish its own fictions from the fundamental facts, as not to know that

" A lie which is half the truth is ever the blackest of lies," was the Church itself so popular, and did its opinions carry such universal weight and authority that the world, which is represented as ever in conflict with its higher ideals and standards, would not have exerted all its acumen and powers of research to discover and reveal the fraud? We know that the world tried its best to destroy the Gospel, but it failed ; and we have seen that in time the truth will out, and that fictions like that of the Donation of Constantine, and in more modern times the miracle of the Holy Thorn, invented from ecclesiastical and party motives, have been mercilessly

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

exposed by the light of the criticism that beats fiercely upon every thing connected with religion.

The alleged miracle of the Holy Thorn (1656) which is said to have been accepted by Pascal, is an instance of how a greatly exaggerated report, based on oral communication, of a cure has been exposed by genuine documents bearing on the case. As the late Professor Abbott¹ proved, "the dramatic account of this miracle is, in fact, nothing but a myth. It is taken from M. Fontaine, who wrote from hearsay, before the original documents had been published; and it furnishes a good illustration of the growth of myths. It is strange that Sir James Stephens, and other writers of the nineteenth century, should copy M. Fontaine's loose account, or even add to his errors, *when the letters of Mdlle. Pascal and of Angelique Arnauld, inmates of the convent at the time, are easily accessible.*" The fact is, the Port-Royalists wanted a miracle. Sister Flavie, whose designing and crafty character is revealed in the correspondence, and who desired to be the Superior of the institution, was frequently attacked, according to herself, by miraculous diseases of which she was always cured by a *soi-disant* miracle, in order to prove herself to be a favoured subject of heaven. This was the person who thought of applying the thorn to the eye of the child. Pascal, Arnauld, and Le Maître accepted the story, because it fell in completely with their prepossessions, without any effort to sift the evidence.

Is it with such fictions that the miracles of the Gospel are to be compared? Why, then, has no

¹ The late Rev. T. K., Senior Fellow T. C. D., in *Hermathena and Essays*, p. 183f.

² The original documents are to be found in "*Recueil de Pièces pour servir à l'Histoire de Port-Royal*," and in Father Clémencet's "*Histoire Générale.*"

hostile or incriminating documentary evidence of the Gospels been discovered? If they were untrue, and invented in the interests of the Church or a party in the Church, they would surely have been exposed long ago, as miracles made to order have always been.

"The evidence for works of healing is good evidence, but it is not evidence for miracles," Mr. Thompson asserts.¹ Accordingly, the objectors like Mr. Thompson are faced with the task of separating the miraculous from the non-miraculous element in the Gospels, "the evidence for works of healing" from the "evidence for miracles." We doubt if they will be one whit more successful than Marcion, who "openly used a knife, not a pen, when dealing with the Scriptures,"² and who cut out large portions of the Gospel of St. Luke and the Epistles of St. Paul, asserting the residuum to be the only correct portions.³ The miraculous element is as the warp belonging to the common Synoptic tradition, and the non-miraculous element is as the woof of the Gospel texture. To rend the woof from the warp of a texture is no easy matter. It would be little short of a literary miracle to do it at all successfully. Yet these critics who are not fond of miracles have set themselves this task. Our argument is that if there is good evidence for the ordinary works of healing, there is equally good evidence for the more extraordinary works.

Was the Church so credulous as to accept everything in the nature of a miracle without examination,

¹ p. 41.

² Tertullian, *De Praes.* 38.

³ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, III., xli. 12. See further I., xxvii. 2, where Marcion is described as erasing from St. Luke all that refers to our Lord's generation and to God the Father as Creator, and from the Pauline Epistles all prophetic allusions and references to the Creator.

simply because it suited its purposes and fell in with its prepossessions? The objectors should surely show that such credulity was a universal or catholic feature of the Church. On what principle, we ask, did the Church in its catholic capacity select the four Gospels from a number of others which were read in the early centuries? ¹ Was it the result of a compromise between the sect of the Valentinians who built up their theory upon the Gospel of St. John, and the sect of Marcion who employed the Gospel of St. Luke, and the Ebonites who only read the Gospel of St. Matthew, and others who, as Irenaeus says, preferred the Gospel of St. Mark? ²

Or was it not rather that in its corporate and catholic capacity as the Body of Christ, guided by the Divine Spirit of the Risen Lord, she distinguished between the inspired and genuine records, and those in which human imagination was allowed to have free play? At any rate, she shed these Apocryphal Gospels, notwithstanding the entertaining reading they provided for those who were interested in the Infancy and Youth of the Master, because, judged by her standards of truth and inspiration they were not worthy of a place in her canon. And had she desired to retain the Marcan Gospel only in its "improved" form in the First and Third Gospels, she had only to shed in similar fashion the Second Gospel. She was evidently unaware that this Gospel was so considerably elaborated in Matthew

¹ The Gospel of Peter was read in Rhossus (so Serapion); Clement mentions the Gospel according to the Egyptians; Origen mentions the *Protevangelium* of James, the Gospel of Thomas; Epiphanius refers to a Gnostic Gospel forged in the name of Philip, and Origen mentions the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles.

² Irenaeus, iii, xi. 7. Harvey (ii. 46) thinks the Ophites are referred to, as St. Mark was associated with Alexandria.

and Luke—a fact which was doubtless hidden from her critical sight by the more elaborate account of certain miracles in Mark.¹

Those who impugn the genuineness and authenticity of these narratives ought surely to account for the honoured position which these four Gospels hold in the sacred literature of the world, the splendid influence they have had in uplifting men to a higher morality and spirituality, the profound theology, so harmonious and consistent in its development, which is based upon them, the great triumph of the Church which went forth with “the four-formed Gospel” in her hand into every civilized and uncivilized portion of the world. Surely we would have expected failure and exposure, and loss not only of authority but of respect, if the ecclesiastical writers of the first century had systematically regarded matters of “present interest” as matters of “permanent value.”² It must truly appear the strangest of all things for those who hold such a theory that matters of “present interest” to the disciples have come to be regarded as matters of “permanent value” by the world, that their additions and improvements of the Gospel, deliberately if piously made, have passed the critical tests of so many centuries successfully. This shows either that there must be something radically

¹ *e.g.*, the demoniac of Gerasa (Mark v. 1–20). The raising of Jairus’s daughter is much more fully described in Mark v. 22–43 than in Matt. ix. 18–26, and the healing of the man deaf and dumb described in Mark vii. 31–36 is omitted in both Luke and Matthew.

² “They recorded what seemed to them to be of permanent value, and ‘permanent value’ meant (as it generally does) ‘present interest.’”—Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 51. This seems pure Pragmatism, which holds that “an idea is true so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives”—(James, *Pragmatism*, p. 75).

wrong with their theory or with the intelligence both of the Church and the world.

It is sometimes imagined that those who are required to defend the Gospels have a Herculean task before them, while those who impugn their genuineness and explain them as distorted, idealized, and elaborated records have a comparatively easy hypothesis to sustain. But this has not been found to be the case. They are confronted with a more difficult problem than we who stand on the defensive. Although the *onus probandi* does not lie upon us, we have seen something of the task that lies before them. They have not succeeded, we submit, in carrying our position with their supposed invincible argument that miracles in the abstract are impossible, and that the miracles of the Gospels are therefore incredible. For it has been shown that nothing can be declared *a priori* impossible but a logical self-contradiction, a "round square," etc., and that their objection to miracles on the ground that they are different from our previous experience is just what the Gospels themselves claim for our Lord's works—"the works that none other did," and involves the appointment of the canon that nothing is to be accepted which is inconsistent with, or contrary to, what we know either directly from our own personal observation, or indirectly from the observation of others. This canon is one that has not been universally or even generally held, as numbers of the most intelligent of men have not seen anything logically impossible in the occurrence of miracles, and it would, if established, act as a brake upon scientific investigation and progress, and a hindrance to the extension of our experience.

Again, when they point out the length of time that divides us from those miracles as a weakness in our evidence, we, on our part, regard this very

length of time as an argument in our favour, for it has seen the rise of a new evidence, the witness of history to the work and power of the Christian Church. We may have less evidence for the *fact* of the miracles of the Gospel, but we have more evidence for the *effect*.

Thirdly, when they emphasize the supposed discrepancies in the Gospel narratives we consider that they are directing attention not to a weak point in the Gospels but to a very strong point, the proof of their independence.

Fourthly, when they lay stress upon the lateness of the Gospel records, we hold that they are making it more difficult for themselves to explain the early chapters of the history of the Church, which, according to their view, preceded the invention of the miracles; and those chapters are, as we have seen, the most difficult to explain on purely naturalistic principles.

Fifthly, when they compare the Gospel miracles with those recorded in Roman Catholic legends, in order to disprove the former by the improbable and dubious nature of the latter, they assume that the cases are similar—an assumption for which they have no warranty. “Assume,” writes Sir James Stephen,¹ “the reality of both series, and without any inconsistency we may regard the one as stamped with the seal of truth, and the other as bearing the impress of error. Our Redeemer’s miracles blend in perfect harmony, though not in absolute unison with those laws, physical and moral, which He established in the creation, and fulfilled in the redemption of the world. In their occasion—in their object—in their fulfilment of prophecy—in their attendant doctrine—and in their exceptional character, they are essentially distinguished from

¹ *Essays*, p. 309.

the perennial miracles of Rome. These are at absolute discord with the laws which the miracles of Christ fulfil. *If compelled to believe them true, we should not be compelled to refer them to a divine original.*"

This after all is a fundamental distinction which the objectors to the Gospel miracles wilfully ignore. They would surely have seen this distinction themselves if they had considered the difference between facts and opinions. We grant that a man like Sir Thomas More suffered for his belief in Papal Supremacy. But that was a dogma, not a fact, and his sufferings for it was no evidence whatever of the truth of the doctrine, although it was a proof of his belief in it. But if anyone had suffered, as the Apostles did in attestation of the accounts which they delivered and in consequence of their belief in them, as original witnesses of such miracles, it would be a proof not merely of their belief in these miracles, but also of the truth of them. Human testimony is no evidence at all for opinions or beliefs, but is the very strongest evidence of the truth of facts.¹

¹ This distinction has been pointed out by Butler. "They allege," he says, "that numberless enthusiastic people in different ages and countries expose themselves to the same difficulties which the primitive Christians did, and are ready to give up their lives for the most idle follies imaginable. But it is not very clear to what purpose this objection is brought. For every one surely in every case must distinguish between *opinions* and *facts*. And though testimony is no proof of enthusiastic opinions, nor of any opinions at all, yet it is allowed in all other cases to be a proof of facts. And a person laying down his life in attestation of facts or of opinions is the strongest proof of his believing them. And if the Apostles or their contemporaries did believe the facts in attestation of which they exposed themselves to sufferings and death, this their belief or rather knowledge, must be a proof of these facts, for they were such as came under the observation of their senses."

CHAPTER XIII

SPIRITUAL SUPREMACY

THERE is every reason for the belief in the existence of an abnormal unique Personality in the days of the Emperor Tiberius. Of that Personality we have a quadruple account in the Gospels. Believers and unbelievers unite in their admiration of the character of the Man therein portrayed. It is a vastly greater stretch of imagination to imagine that there was no original for such a portrait, and that the writers—it matters not who they were so much as when they wrote—invented the story and its hero than to believe that they drew from the living model. And if there is good foundation for the human element in the Gospels, there is surely foundation for something more, something that cannot be explained by natural evolution, unless we are so devoid of common-sense as to believe and assert that the greatest power for moral and spiritual good that has ever appeared in the world is “the greatest failure the world has ever known.” This is one of the paradoxical sayings of modern unbelief which is absolutely bizarre, and has only to be stated to be refuted by the common-sense of humanity.

Well, then, admitting the existence of such a remarkable character and personality as the Christ of the Gospels, it is only to be expected that remarkable works should be performed by Him, works of a kind that are in harmony with His Character, that are the suitable phenomena of such a Personality and the appropriate accompaniments of His doctrine. The records state that such is the case, and as Canon

Sanday declares, " We may say broadly, then, that the narrative of miracle in the Gospels rests on sound historical foundation, and that the evidence for the New Testament miracles is good." ¹

We have seen that such works were never purposeless, that they fall into a complete system of manifestations, signs and symbolical acts relating to the Christ's sovereignty over nature, restoration of man, and power over the spirit world. They were ethically and spiritually in keeping with the Divine Mission and Nature of the Worker. The legendary and mythical hypotheses are inconsistent with an age of great literary and historical works, and with the *rationale* of the Gospel history, in which every detail was told as fully in the first century as it is known to-day. The witnesses were not deceivers. We can easily imagine that a band of impostors would conspire to float a bogus company on fictitious securities, but human imagination cannot conceive a band of perjurers combining to exploit by lies and falsehoods the highest system of religion, the purest system of morality, at the risk not only of their property, but of their lives ; and enduring persecution, torture, loss of home, family, children, all the world counts dear, and life itself, for the sake of a propaganda they knew to be false. And it is a certain fact that they bore their testimony to the Lord's miracles as the expression of His Nature. Neither were the witnesses deceived. The hypotheses of " fanaticism " and " hallucination " are equally untenable as that of fraud in the case of men who showed themselves on many occasions so incredulous, and who are reported to have drawn upon themselves the censure of their Master for their " unbelief and hardness of heart," a rebuke that would have been

¹ *Christianity and Miracles, Historical Evidence*, Church Congress, 1912.

omitted by less sincere reporters. There is nothing more remote from the "atmosphere" of the Gospels than extravagance. The same sobriety of tone, the same simplicity of diction characterizes the narratives, in which the most essential matters are related as those in which the most trivial are recorded. The Gospel evidence to its own truth is by no means to be neglected by Christians and Churchmen, even if they cannot agree in matters concerning dates and authorship.

In another place we have had the opportunity to discuss more fully this evidence. Here we are dealing with evidence of another kind, evidence that perhaps may have more weight with those who do not accept at all or only in part the Christian revelation. Is there such evidence? In a word, is there evidence of any spiritual interference with things physical? That is the question. Now, if there is a class of phenomena which is believed by well-known men of science to be the result of causes either spiritual or inconceivable to man, we have not only good grounds for asserting both the possibility and the probability of miracles, but also for giving up apology, and for carrying the war into the enemy's camp.

The Psychical Research Society was founded in 1882 for the purpose of investigating a class of phenomena that science had somewhat neglected in the past, such as thought-transference, automatic writing, and apparitions, in order to see if it would be possible or not to give any scientific or reasonable explanation of them, and to bring them within the region of ordered knowledge. Its first President was Professor Henry Sidgwick, no easy person to convince, and one of its first honorary secretaries was the famous F. W. Meyers. Other Presidents were A. J. Balfour, Professor William James, Sir W.

Crookes, Sir W. Barrett, and last but not least Sir Oliver Lodge. Of these, Professor James in his Ingersoll lectures set himself to examine the dictum of materialists that "thought is a function of the brain," which he accepted, though not in their sense. For he showed that two functions may be referred to, a function of production and a function of transmission. It is the function of the heated boiler to produce steam; but it is the function of the organ to transmit sound, modified by passing through the pipes. In the same way it is the function of the brain not to produce thought, but to transmit it. Telepathic communication and interchange of thought is a well-established fact.¹ Even if the connecting link be the subtle ether, it proves that thought is something more than the function of the brain. Professor James regards the whole material universe as an enormous veil that hides the world of realities from us, and describes "the genuine matter of reality, the life of souls as it is in its fulness breaking through our several brains in all sorts of restricted forms and with all the imperfections and queernesses that characterize our finite individualities here below."² His view, then, is that the brain exercises a releasing or transmissive function. This is surely a distinct advance beyond Professor Tyn-dall's position that "in matter may be discerned the promise and potency of all terrestrial life"—an apophthegm deliberately reversed by Sir W.

¹ Sir Oliver Lodge writes: "That this community of mind or possibility of distant interchange or reception of thoughts exists is to me perfectly clear and certain. I venture further to say that persons who deny the bare fact, expressed as these wish to express it without any hypothesis, are simply ignorant. They have not studied the facts of the subject."

² See *Human Immortality*, by William James.

Crookes¹ in his dictum, "In life I see the promise and potency of all forms of matter."

The new conception of matter as a form of ether in motion, a substance which is universal, invisible, and all-pervading, at any rate lifts us above the tangible and visible world, and prepares us to receive and accept phenomena almost beyond the borderland of science, even if they are not altogether what we would designate as spiritual.² Psychology has also focussed its attention upon the subconscious strata of thought with surprising results. In that subconscious or subliminal,³ as Meyers called it, domain are lurking faculties that transcend our ordinary powers. Meyers himself studied this so-called subliminal self, this submerged region of the human personality. He compares our conscious life to the mountain peaks that emerge above the waves of the ocean, as islands, or to the colours of the solar spectrum that emerge into visibility out of the totality of the invisible vibrations of the ether. In this region, hidden below the waves of consciousness, lies the secret of our individuality, of our inmost self. The mysterious nature of our Being, though not plainly revealed, is sufficiently shown indirectly to possess powers and capabilities beyond the utmost stretch of our imagination. Such at least suggest that, so far from the mind being dependent upon matter, it is an independent entity itself. It is in their subliminal depths that the minds of men are associated with one another and with the same Universal All-pervading Mind,⁴ just as the isles

¹ Presidential Address to British Association, 1898.

² See *Future Life*, by Louis Elbé, Eng. Trans., cc. viii.-xii.

³ *Sub limine* = beneath the threshold.

⁴ We have already seen that the existence of such a Mind is required to explain our standards of values in Truth, Morals, and Æsthetics.

of the ocean are connected with each other through having their foundation in the same ocean bed. A new light is thus thrown by psychology on the solidarity of humanity, on the subtle and invisible wires of thought and feeling that run like fibres through the universal Body. While we see new proofs of the indestructibility of energy in the form of thought, and of matter as the investiture of thought, we also perceive that the materialistic explanation of the Universe, which rejected the miracles of the Gospel, is inadequate and insufficient.

But while many strange psychical phenomena in the vicinity may be explained as the externalisation of the ethereal double,¹ and while the clue of many strange phenomena that involve distance may be supplied by telepathy, or the subconscious transmission of thought, there remains a residuum of phenomena, such as automatic writing, that is inexplicable on any other assumption than the interposition of some invisible and spiritual power, good or evil.

How, without taking the supernatural into account, can we explain that alteration of personality which reminds one of the "possession" of the Gospels, when the patient loses memory of his own past and present, and in the new character, or characters, for there may be many, speaks and writes messages at the suggestion of his "control" or "controls," in a language and concerning matters which he, in his normal condition, does not understand? That such a thing—which seems to many of us a fearful and uncanny phenomenon—has been frequently done is attested by many who have reputations to lose.²

¹ Louis Elbé, *The Future Life*, c. x.

² The difficulty regarding such communications is two-fold. In the first place, if they are not known to anyone

With regard to these "controls" or "intelligences" which claim to be the spirits of the dead, we must admit either that they belong to a supernatural sphere or that the true explanation is beyond us altogether. Dr. Hodgson, who experimented with one well-known medium for years, held that the spirits are either those of departed human beings or spirits deliberately personating such. The latter hypothesis might be illustrated from the Bible. Sir W. Crookes¹ held that outside our scientific knowledge there exists a force exercised by intelligence differing from the ordinary intelligence common to mortals. With him are ranged the celebrated friend and rival of Darwin, Dr. A. R. Wallace, Sidgwick, Meyers, James, Lodge, Hyslop, etc., who were and are convinced of the truth of these phenomena and of their supernatural explanation. Indeed, science can no longer assert that there is no evidence (1) for the power of the mind over the body, or (2) for the existence of a supersensible world, or (3) for the possibility of the occasional communication between such a world and ours.

The whole case has been well summed up and its bearing upon the miracles of the Gospel well pointed out by Professor Dolbear in the words :²

"There is already a body of evidence which cannot safely be ignored, that physical phenomena sometimes take place when all the ordinary physical

alive, they cannot be verified ; whereas if they are known to anyone still alive, there is the possibility that his mind has influenced the medium. This difficulty has been obviated by a system of cross-correspondence, one "control" acting through two or more mediums, and giving them portions of the message which, unintelligible in themselves, make up an intelligible whole.

¹ President of British Association, 1898.

² In *Matter, Ether and Motion* (S.P.C.K.) (1899), p. 354.

antecedents are absent, when bodies move without touch or electric or magnetic agencies—movements which are orderly, and more or less subject to volition. In addition to this is still other evidence of competent critical observers that the subject-matter of thought is directly transferable from one mind to another. Such things are now well vouched for, and those who have not chanced to be witnesses have no *a priori* right from physics or philosophy to deny such statements. . . . If such things be true, they are of more importance to philosophy than the whole body of physical knowledge we now have, and of vast importance to humanity, for it gives to religion corroborative testimony of the real existence of possibilities for which it has always contended. *The antecedent improbabilities of such occurrences as have been called miracles, which were very great because they were plainly incompatible with the commonly held theory of matter and its forces, have been removed and their antecedent probabilities greatly strengthened by this new knowledge.*”

These facts are evidence of the existence of a psychic region external to us. And if so, they not only throw light on the survival of the soul in a more spiritual condition, but also on the possibility of communications of the supernatural in the form of revelations, and of interventions of the supernatural in the form of miracles.

For if there be such a sphere, it is only natural to expect that such communications would take place. If we can point to communications which, we are informed upon good authority, had such an origin, and if such communications always have a spiritual purpose, and teach a philosophy higher than that of this world, and have a broader and grander outlook and standpoint than any purely terrestrial scheme of life or morality, we have a

fresh confirmation that they emanated from a spiritual and divine source, in their agreement with the voice of the spiritual faculty within us.

If such spiritual communications proceeded from such a source to man, would it be remarkable if such uncommon messages were delivered in an uncommon way? Nay, the wonder would be if they were not accompanied by some striking events to emphasize both their coming and their meaning.

The Life of the Incarnate Christ is therefore quite reasonably represented in the Gospels as accompanied by many signs and wonderful works, the natural concomitants of a supernatural Personality. His life and character were apparently a breach with the law of uniformity; it was therefore to be expected that His words and works, the things He told and the things He did, would also apparently be a breach with that same law.

But when all is said, we must remember that such miracles are not the primary, but only the secondary evidence of the revelation. The agreement or harmony of that revelation with the spiritual law, the voice of God within us, the dictates and feelings and aspirations of our own conscience, is the strongest corroboration of a revelation we can obtain. The reason for this is evident. For even our opponents will admit that a man of unstained virtue and unimpeachable morality is a nobler specimen of humanity than a man of more brilliant parts, but of inferior morals. While the genius is said to be born and not made, the good man is not made without a stern discipline and system of self-restraint and self-sacrifice. It is our contention that the revelation that Christ has given of the Heavenly Father and of the life that leads to Him is better fitted to create that type than any scheme of philosophy devised and promulgated by the world's

greatest luminaries. It is no wonder that the system that tends to create and foster the noblest type of manhood appeals to the noblest and divinest part of our nature.

That part of us—which is generally known as the spiritual faculty—is the only arbiter of a revelation we can recognize. By its standard of judgment that which claims to be a communication from another world must stand or fall. For it is only by the spiritual that the spiritual can be discerned and the unspiritual condemned, just as it is only by the intellectual that the intellectual can be appreciated and the opposite exposed. The character of a revelation is, accordingly, the chief testimony to its intrinsic worth, its genuineness and veracity.

Moreover, if such a revelation, which has been proved to be, ethically and spiritually, the highest scheme of religion and philosophy by its harmony with our conscience, is propagated by a system of which beneficent deeds, miraculous cures, and wonderful works performed on nature, man and the spirit world—all signs of a Divine Presence, Power, Providence, and Love—form a conspicuous part, we have corroborative evidence of the truth, goodness, and authority of the revelation. But such evidence, being external, is naturally inferior to the internal testimony of the revelation itself to its own merits. In many ways it is less convincing to us in this stage of the world's history for the following reasons: (1) In the first place, it is wrongly assumed by both apologists and antagonists of the faith that its miraculous accompaniments, and not its own miraculous character, are its chief evidence. Both seem to take it for granted that revelation implies a breach with the law of uniformity, and both parties practically define a miracle as a violation or suspension of this law. But revelation is not bound, as

has been well said,¹ by this definition. It is not an impossible hypothesis that this breach of the law of uniformity may be only superficial and apparent. Even if all the miraculous events of the Gospels could some day be explained by causes that would then appear ordinary, their character as secondary and corroborative evidence of the truth of the Revelation with which they were associated would not be affected. For what Revelation insists on principally is the superiority of the spiritual and the moral to the physical and natural, its appeal being solely to the higher department of our complex personality. If, when it was first published or taught, it was accompanied by circumstances that were then unusual but have afterwards become usual, those circumstances have fulfilled their purpose by directing attention at the time to the character of the revelation and to the endowment of its missioners. As contemporary evidence they were a success and not a failure, even if they may be proved by the science of the future to have been but the ordinary consequences of hitherto unknown laws.

Psychical research has opened many avenues of study into the human personality, and it is not altogether improbable that what seemed to people in early days and to us now to be miraculous phenomena, may then appear to be but the logical and natural result of the superiority of mind to matter. Suppose, for example, the miraculous gifts of healing possessed by our Lord may be explained as due to the wonderful power of His mind over matter, which others have possessed in an imperfect degree compared with Him, those gifts would be none the less miraculous for the purpose of the Revelation, if not for science. They no longer occupy a position in the front rank of evidence. They have already

¹ The late Dr. Temple, *Bampton Lectures*, 1884, p. 195.

fulfilled their rôle as evidence of the divine authority and power of the Christ and His Church. For us the Revelation itself takes precedence of the signs by which it was propagated, while it is identified with others, the Incarnation and Resurrection, which it included. But it cannot but seem designed, appropriate and harmonious, that a Revelation whose leading feature is the supremacy of the spiritual and the moral over the material should be introduced by a system of signs whose predominant mark is the superiority of mind and will to matter, especially when we consider how near the mental is to the spiritual, and how necessary the freedom of will is to the moral system.

The objection is made against the evidence that is forthcoming of such a Revelation that it runs counter to the law of uniformity, for which there is considerably more evidence. But we have already seen that that law is simply a generalisation, and that we cannot set bounds to the possibilities of nature. The apparent uniformity of physical nature is often broken, and there are many gaps in its uniformity, especially when the freedom of the will and the conscience of man are concerned—for the moral claims precedence over the physical. Indeed the late Dr. Temple went so far as to say that "Science has rendered it highly probable that the uniformity of nature is never broken except for a moral purpose."¹ But it is true that for such a purpose the will is free, and for such a purpose that Revelation claims to be superior to nature. Even if the claim for freedom of will be unduly pushed, and even if religions professing to have revelations have included miracles that served no moral purpose, "this does not affect the general conclusion that the evidence for uniformity has never succeeded

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

and can never succeed in showing that the God Who made and rules the universe never sets aside a physical law for a moral purpose, either by working through the human will or by direct action on external nature." ¹

It is also objected that the evidence for such Revelation is not precise or scientific enough, that it required a weeding-out by cross-examination in its own day. It is quite unreasonable to expect that the witnesses of the signs of Christ should have anticipated the intellectual needs and methods of the twentieth century, and should have overloaded their books with material that was superfluous in its own day. Did the scientific engineers of that day anticipate the scientific discoveries in this age of flying machines and wireless telegraphy? Nay, the very people who demand this would themselves be the first to denounce such anticipation as an anachronism that revealed the falsehood of the work in question. The fact is that for a Revelation that claims to be moral and spiritual, no ordinary evidence but evidence of a moral and spiritual type must be supplied. The moral and spiritual evidence we have for the genuineness of the Gospel is the character of our Lord Himself. He claimed to be superior to physical nature. He declared that He was "from above." His spiritual and ethical qualities and His outward actions as revealed in the Gospel confirm His claim. That is, His own witness to Himself cannot be shaken by the scrutiny of the most severe critic. If any flaw in that wonderful portrait could be discovered; any imperfection in His temper and disposition; any sign of weakness and vacillation in His mind; any trace of self-deceit, vanity or egotism, could be found, it would have been found long ago. But many who commenced to examine

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

these records with a hostile bias have concluded in a very different frame of mind.

Again, the evidence of the disciples who were absolutely under His spiritual sway and moral influence, who preached Christ and Him crucified, whose whole desire was to serve Christ, Whom they followed as their Master and adored as their God, was given in a manner in which no evidence is ever given in our days. No perjurers ever die for a cause they have puffed for their own profit, and with a prayer on their lips for those who were doing them to death. Let those who seek to belittle the nature of the evidence study a little more carefully the characters, the performances, and sufferings of the witnesses down to the third century, and if they do not find there something transcendently superior to their own spiritual and moral nature, they are free to dispense for ever with the moral and spiritual helps that poor erring humanity requires for its pilgrim's progress to the Eternal City, and which we Christians believe have been provided for us in the Gospels of the Christ. For therein we find the principle of the absolute supremacy of the spiritual and the moral to the material and the carnal, embodied in the Life and Character of the Only Man Who ever lived Who could say, "I have overcome the world."

CHAPTER XIV

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE WORKS OF CHRIST

THE miracles of the Gospel not only supply us with evidence of the truth of the doctrine ; we also have in them spiritual instruction. We may not benefit by them materially. But we derive spiritual benefit from the lessons they teach of God's sufficiency and man's insufficiency, of God's power and man's infirmity, of God's readiness to succour the helpless and to supply the needs of man, of His infinite resources, and of His great purpose to redeem and restore man and his environment, and to deliver both from the dominion of evil and cruel spirits. As we carefully consider the works of the Lord, we notice that they are not isolated and unconnected incidents. According to their respective spheres and symbolical meanings they fall into an ordered system of three groups. Regarded as to their sphere there are (1) His works on nature, (2) His works on man, (3) His works on the spirit-world. According to their symbolical meaning we have (1) His works of power and providence, (2) His works of grace and redemption, and (3) His works of judgment and control.

I.—WORKS ON NATURE

The wonderful works of our Lord are types of the way He works on nature, on man, on the spirit-world, typical acts of His sovereignty over nature, of His restoration of man, of His control and judgment of the evil spirits.

Consider His nature miracles first. They fall

into two classes, miracles of power and miracles of providence. Among the former class we have :

- (1) The water turned into wine.¹
- (2) The multiplication of the loaves.²
- (3) The walking on the water.³

These works reveal Him in His threefold relation to humanity, as the author of their joy ; the source of their substance ; the cause of their security.

Certain episodes in the Old Testament are said to throw a forward light upon them, such as the turning of the water into blood of Exodus vii, the manna of Exodus xvi, the meal and oil multiplied in 1 Kings xvii, the oil multiplied in 2 Kings iv, the increase of the barley-loaves in 2 Kings iv, and the passage of Jordan in Joshua iii. The late Bishop Westcott states that "the parallels to these miracles in the Old Testament offer the materials for an instructive

¹ John ii. 1-12.

² Matt. xiv. 15-21 ; also in Mark vi. 35-44 ; Luke ix. 12-17 ; John vi. 5-14. *See also* Matt. xv. 32-39 ; Mark viii. 1-10. There are six different accounts of this act, which may have been repeated. Mr. Thompson remarks : "It is difficult to see why, unless there was some ecclesiastical motive for its preservation, the story of this miracle should have appeared six times in the Gospels, and always with such an amount of detail" (*op. cit.*, p. 47). One might observe that it was because they were sure at any rate of that one deed. But no. He observes : "The fact that it is so often described is not a sign that the Evangelists were particularly sure that it happened, but rather that it was particularly appropriate to the needs of those for whom they wrote." So, then, we are to take it that the reason Mr. Thompson so frequently repeats the statement "there is no evidence for miracles" (p. 20, p. 33, p. 35, p. 41, p. 58, etc.), is not because he is particularly sure they did not happen, but rather because it is particularly appropriate to the needs of those for whom he wrote that there should be no miracle.

³ Matt. xiv. 22-26, etc.

comparison.”¹ But the analogy must not be pressed. The incidents do not stand on the same level of evidence or religious instruction; and it is clear that the Gospel incidents cannot be explained on the principle of assimilation to the Old Testament episodes. Mr. Thompson² finds this principle at work in the narrative of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, in which he sees an assimilation not only to the past, but also to the institution of the Agape and Eucharist. But even such an assimilation to the actual experience of Christian worship would not remove the miraculous from the narrative even if it did explain a few details.

Among the works of providence are :

- (1) The miraculous draught of fishes.³
- (2) The stilling of the storm.⁴
- (3) The second miraculous draught of fishes.⁵

Bishop Westcott includes the stater in the fish's mouth and the blasting of the fig tree.⁶ But it

¹ *Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles*, p. 21. The present writer has found many suggestions for this chapter in that work. ² *Op. cit.*, p. 46. ³ Luke v. 1-11.

⁴ Matt. viii. 23-27; Mark iv. 35-41; Luke viii. 22-25.

⁵ John xxi. 1-23.

⁶ Mr. Thompson (*op. cit.*, p. 49) finds the clue of this incident in the parable of the fig-tree in Luke xiii. 6, “which was doubtless interpreted as symbolical of the visit of Jesus (the owner) to Jerusalem (the fig-tree).” But it is quite probable that the episode really took place, and that the difficulty of harmonizing Matthew's record (xxi. 19), in which the tree withered away immediately, with the Marcan account (xi. 12-14, 20-23), in which a respite is given and the lesson of prayer attached to it, is due to the omission of some incident we cannot now reconstruct. It is also possible that the notion of the validity of a curse can explain something in this story. What I believe happened is that when our Lord saw the barrenness of the fig-tree he made the simple and obvious statement: “No

seems unnecessary to do so. These results of our Lord's divine wisdom and energy, obtained at His command, reveal Him in His threefold relation to His Church as its Founder, its Director, and its Saviour—in a word, as its Redeemer and its Lord.

As the miracles of power represent Him in His creative capacity, these show Him in the rôle of Preserver of the order He created, and of the Church He founded. This is an instructive and significant distinction.

To return to the miracles of power : these transformation scenes in the house, the wilderness and the stormy lake, when disappointment was turned into joy, hunger into satisfaction, fear into the sense of security, were parables in action. They represent the power our Christ has of transforming our common life, the customary gatherings and relationships, the ordinary needs, the natural feelings, and the common elements by His Divine presence, benediction and touch. They are in a sense sacraments, because they reveal the interaction of the Divine in the natural, and the conversion of the common elements, water and bread, into vehicles of blessing and means of grace. This is doubtless the reason why the water of purification is transmuted into the wine of gladness at His word, the wheaten loaf is multiplied by His love, the wild waves are subdued beneath His tread. In these three incidents faith is represented in three different aspects, which serve to complete each other. In

man shall eat fruit of thee for ever," and this was magnified into a denunciation. Similarly, we find that the denunciations of the imprecatory psalms can be explained as originally statements. The curse would be meaningless if we regard the fig-tree as symbolical of the Jewish nation, for our Lord never cursed that nation. He wept over them, and He prayed for their pardon with His last breath.

the first place, the faith of the servants conveyed a blessing which it did not share, as far as we know. This teaches us to be unselfish, and not always to seek our own advantage, but to rejoice in helping others. Then we learn that the faith that gives to God is rewarded (although we should not think of the reward, but of the joy of the service). For the one small basket of bread and fish the disciples gave they received twelve baskets. And, finally, we see that the faith that has served others and given to the Lord, and longs for His reappearing, receives a personal answer amid the storm and wrack of life, when the very elements of our existence have burst forth beyond our control.

Again in three ways these deeds of power resemble each other. They supplied a passing need, which in itself is a call upon God; they were not understood by the disciples;¹ and they cannot be explained by us, for the analogy between these miraculous works and the processes of nature which was drawn by St. Augustine² is interesting but cannot be pressed into the argument.

In the miracles of Providence we have a different type of working. It is a natural thing for a storm to cease when it has worked off its rage and lost its force. It is a natural thing for fishermen to get big hauls of fish when they find a school, which is more often sighted from the shore, or the bank, if it be high above the water-line. But the supernatural element here is the coincidence³ of the

¹ "They understood not concerning the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened"—Mark vi. 52. "Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened?"—Mark viii. 17.

² "Ipse fecit vinum nuptiis qui omni anno hoc facit in vitibus."

³ Mr. Thompson misses this point completely. He admits that the use of the same language to the wind and

Lord's word and the result. At this moment there is a high wind blowing round this church—it is bound to go down in time ; but suppose some one here and now rebuked it, and it subsided immediately at his word, that would be a miraculous intervention. The unexpected hauls of fish, the first representing the first gathering of the Church out of the world, its beginning, the second foreshadowing the second gathering of the Church out of the world, its consummation, and the subsidence of the storm, were incidents with which man is familiar. But there must have been something especially striking at the time about the circumstances of all three incidents, something that gave evidence of preternatural knowledge, to judge from the impressions they made upon the witnesses, which must be regarded as original, for they could not have been invented afterwards. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,"¹ was St. Peter's cry at the first of these signs. "They feared with a great fear, and said to one another : What manner of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him ?"² was the effect of the second. "It is the Lord," cried John, when he perceived the third.³

These miracles are signs not only of a new energy, which was revealed in the miracles of power, but of a new order and course of things. In the former men's needs were supplied ; in the latter their labours are blessed. We cannot see these miracles with the same eyes as those who witnessed them. Our interpretation of natural force and law may be

to the sea as to a man with an unclean spirit (" rebuked," ἐπετίμησε) " seems to be authentic." " But," he says, " the incident becomes a miracle only if we think that a storm which arose from natural causes could not have subsided naturally " (*op. cit.*, p. 43).

¹ Luke v. 8.

² Mark iv. 41.

³ John xxi. 7.

different from theirs. But they cannot have been deceived into believing that something exceptional was taking place in their midst, as the impression recorded was exceptional. Such miracles as these are surely designed to teach mankind that unthinking force and cast-iron law do not rule the Universe; that as the water was converted into wine, so there is a glorious transformation scene awaiting us when these our earth-bound but not earth-born faculties shall be set free; and that as the bread sustained the starving multitudes in the desert, so the Bread of Life, which is inexhaustible, can supply the wants of all who hunger after righteousness.

This idea is beautifully expressed by Dr. Westcott in the words: "The present laws of force and substance are once for all subjected to the Saviour, that we may look onwards in hope to the glories of a new heaven and a new earth. The veil is raised from the mysterious concurrence of events that we may learn to work with confidence in the economy of the present world. The signs which are given us are enough to kindle our faith, enough to raise us from a blind idolatry of physical laws, enough to quicken us with the consciousness of some nobler Presence, of some higher Power, and yet not so frequent as to bring confusion or uncertainty into that order which, however marred, is yet God's work. With a voice of boundless authority and gentlest comfort, they tell us that the creative energy which we find not only in the first origin of things, but also in successive epochs, is not yet exhausted. . . They tell us that we are not bound up in a system which is eternal and unchangeable. . . And even now in the midst of our imperfect and inconstant struggles, the promises which shall one day be fully realized find a partial accomplishment. . . . Not in old time only, but now, now

in this age of faithless disquiet and restless zeal, Christ is seen as the Creator and Preserver, transfiguring our common joys, ministering to our common wants, calming the storms which threaten to overwhelm us, and vindicating His supremacy over the elements among which our life is thrown."

These miracles performed on the natural world, on the physical environment of man, are symbolical of the miracle God is ever working in and upon the spiritual environment of the Christian, the Divine *Ecclesia*, the Church which is the Body of Christ, and which He is preparing to be His own Bride, transforming her weakness into strength, multiplying His gifts of grace within her, and by His own word and presence removing the fears and calming "the waves of this troublesome world," waves of bitter hostility and inward division that impede the course and work of His Church Militant upon earth.

II.—WORKS ON MAN

Our Lord's miracles on the body of man, in restoring it to health and physical soundness, were symbolical of the miracle He works in the spiritual life of man, by redeeming it from a hostile evil power, from the pleasures of the world, and from the lust of the flesh. His supreme dominion over nature, manifested in the works of power already recorded, reveal mankind in Him resuming its original divine donation.¹ His power to restore the human body, entire and in part, to its own proper use and work signifies the recovery of man's original divine endowment.² Man's environment having witnessed the majestic power that can convert the desert into the garden of the Lord, man's own body feels the divine grace that can remove its every sickness, its

¹ Gen. i. 26.

² Gen. i. 26, 27.

every sorrow, its every sin. We see Him performing work after work of mercy, until the raising of the dead completes the plan of man's restoration. As He looked upon the maladies and diseases of the flesh, the sorrows and troubles of man, the Lord discerns clearly the cause and source of the corrupting influence, "the enemy that hath done this." This gave a personal touch to His rebuking of the fever¹ and the wind. Such miracles of deliverance and restoration, typical of greater miracles in the spirit-world, were the fitting accompaniments of the Redeemer's rôle. Parables in one sense, they were sacraments in another. For we find in them the action and the interaction of the human and the Divine. We see the Lord wrestling in the power of a God and in the pity of a man with human misery and spiritual despair. As sacraments they are pledges of His Divine Presence in human nature and life; and they are an earnest of His final victory over every form of evil, physical and spiritual. His humanity is revealed to us in the many traces, the manifold indications we see of His conflict with the forces of evil which He eventually overcame on the Cross, when He resigned His human life in the hour of its supreme achievement. He seems to have really taken upon Himself the maladies He removed from others; He seems to have actually borne in His own Person the sicknesses He healed in others.

The Lord's works of healing are of a threefold character, representing respectively faith in the sufferers, faith in those who brought them, and His own faith in humanity. We have the cures He wrought upon believing patients; cures He wrought at the prayers of others; cures He wrought spontaneously in His pity for humanity, in His

¹ Luke iv. 39 (ἐπετίμησε τῷ πυρετῷ); Matt. viii. 26 (ἐπετίμησε τοῖς ἀνεμοῖς).

faith in its ultimate restoration. The first class of cures was wrought in connection with interesting persons, the two blind men of Matthew ix, who followed Him into the house, blind Bartimaeus who would not be silenced, the Samaritan leper who returned to give Him thanks, and the woman who had the issue of blood and touched the hem of His garment. Blindness and leprosy, which could be cured only by the Lord, were symbols of the darkness and pollution of sin. These cures show us that personal faith and persistent prayer are rewarded by the blessing of hearing such words as "Thy faith hath saved thee." "Go into peace."

In the second class of cures, those wrought at the intercession of others, the cure is accompanied by some symbolic word or action designed to draw out towards Himself faith in the patient. To the sick of the palsy, borne of four, He said: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."¹ The blind man of Bethsaida, who was brought to Him, He led away from the multitude, and spit on his eyes, put His hands upon him and asked him if he saw aught. The man looked up and said he saw men, for he beheld them as trees walking. Then He put His hands upon him again, and bade him look up, and this time he saw all men clearly.² In the previous chapter³ there is a description of another patient brought to Jesus also treated privately by Him, and with certain symbolic signs, *e.g.*, by inserting His fingers into his ears, spitting, and touching his tongue, looking up to heaven with a heavy sigh (ἐστέναιξεν), and saying "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

Mr. J. M. Thompson states that the incidents are probably omitted by St. Matthew and St. Luke on the ground that "the method of cure was not

¹ Mark ii. 5.

² Mark viii. 22-26.

³ vii. 31-37.

easy and miraculous enough.”¹ He regards them as purely faith-cures. “In none,” he says, “need we posit a miracle.” This view appears to us to be unsatisfactory. For in the first place, the method followed by our Lord is not proof of a tentative performance, but shows an effort to elicit and educate the faith of the patient. Our Lord wished to show that the source of healing was in Himself, in Him, Jesus the Son of God, and that from Himself, His own Person, the healing power went forth. In the second place, in a faith-cure the faith of the patient is required at least as a condition, and in these cases the patients were brought by others who interceded for them. The ministry of such intercession, when the father pleads for his son,² when the father pleads for his daughter, and the master for his servant,³ and the servants for their master,⁴ was a very beautiful service, and was richly blessed by Christ Himself.

On other occasions our Lord of His own accord put forth His power to heal and restore. These works were wrought in pity for human troubles, but more especially in His belief in humanity, in the faith that some at least would understand Him and His purpose, and appreciate and accept His principle. This explains why such works were wrought upon the Sabbath Day.⁵ He chose that day in spite of the fact that it was bound to bring Him into conflict with the Jewish authorities, who clung with all their national stubbornness to the observance of the letter, though they had long lost the spirit of their ritual. He chose it to emphasize the fact that the old ritual was to be superseded by a religion of which the brotherhood of humanity

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 34. ² John iv. ³ Matt. vii. ⁴ Matt. ix.

⁵ *e.g.*, the blind beggar of John ix., the impotent man (ὁ ἀσθενὴς) of John v. are cases in point.

was to be the hearth and the Fatherhood of God the altar stone of the shrine, in which worship was the true Sabbath rest, and work the true Sabbath service. Death too He conquered in order to show that He is the Resurrection and the Life.

From all these works we learn (1) that Jesus is the Restorer of human life; (2) that He answers the prayer of faith both for self and one's brother-man; and (3) that it is they who touch Him, who lay hold upon the border of His garment, who are made whole. These last are freed from every impurity of soul as they are from every foulness of body, leprosy, running sores, issues of blood. If the chief end and object of these miracles on man was to reveal a Divine power that opens the eyes of the blind, and removes the stains of the unclean; to manifest a Divine grace that can set free the halting tongue, and make straight the bent frame; to display a Divine love that can conquer death and all its powers, they have not been wrought in vain.

The question is, how are we to regard these cures apart from such spiritual lessons? Mr. J. M. Thompson says of the cures recorded in St. Mark's Gospel, "There is probably not one of the latter which either is not explicable, or if we knew the original facts, would not be explicable, as an instance of faith healing. The patients as a whole belong to a class which has always cured itself by faith—faith in a person, or in a place, or in the efficacy of a ritual act. The power to call out and exercise this faith was undoubtedly present in Jesus in an exceptional degree. But it was not a miraculous power."¹ For this emphatic statement no evidence whatever is offered. It is the statement of Mr. Thompson's own opinion made as if it was a statement of fact. The two things may not be identical.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

An impartial study of the Gospel records in question will show that they have been misunderstood and misinterpreted through what seems an adverse pre-conception. Our Lord certainly required faith at times ¹ as a condition of His healing power. An unbelieving attitude in anyone present may have been an obstacle to His working. And to certain people He said, "Thy faith hath saved thee," ² and to another, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." ³ But the actual healing itself, as Dr. R. J. Ryle says, is described "as a free gift granted by the Healer in recognition of the presence of faith. . . . It was not by any means always due to faith on the part of the diseased person, but might be due to faith on the part of one who was interested in the patient." ⁴ This latter fact surely distinguishes our Lord's miracles from faith healing, in which the real force which works the patient's cure is in the patient's own mind. It is quite possible that the excited and expectant frame of mind in the people who followed Jesus might have made any of them who were suffering from functional diseases of the nervous system more susceptible to be cured by mental healing or psychotherapeutics. It is an undoubted fact that as the mind can occasionally injure the body, it can occasionally restore it. Certain bodily ailments are due to mental causes, and are consequently amenable to psycho-therapeutic treatment. Such are all forms of imaginary, psychic and functional nervous disorders, *e.g.*, melancholy and hysteria. The emotions have a considerable effect upon the sympathetic

¹ Luke viii. 50 (Jairus).

² Mark x. 52 (Bartimæus) ; Luke xvii. 19 (the Samaritan leper) ; Matt. ix. 22 (the woman with the issue of blood).

³ Mark ix. 24.

⁴ *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1907; pp. 584, *et seq.*

nerve-system, and consequently the machinery of the nervous organism, being of a delicate nature, is disorganized by any paralyzing emotion such as fear, while it is stimulated by any exciting emotion such as faith.¹ This explains the reflex action of prayer upon the mind that prays.²

But the question is, are the cases of healing which Mr. Thompson says "do not go beyond the ascertained or ascertainable results of faith healing" amenable to psycho-therapeutic treatment? Dr. R. J. Ryle, a medical man, says they are not. He has diagnosed each case separately in a manner which of course Mr. Thompson, who yet claims to speak with authority on the diseases of the Bible, has not the requisite scientific and professional training to do. For example, with regard to leprosy Mr. Thompson makes the statement that "faith cures are common enough in the case of skin diseases,"³ again advancing no reason or proof of what he states. He does not attempt to prove that the leprosy mentioned in the Gospels was a skin disease so curable; whereas Dr. Ryle, who is entitled to be heard in this matter says, "It is at

¹ See I. H. Coriat, M.D., *Religion and Medicine*, pp. 293, *et seq.*

² See McComb's *Religion and Medicine*, p. 394, where the therapeutic value of prayer is described. "It is obvious," he says, "that such a spiritual exercise must have a beneficial reflex effect upon the mind of him who prays." In the faith-cures performed at shrines, etc., although there has been a great deal of pretence, their success for a time seems "to show that they rested on a reality, and that reality seems to have consisted in the strange power of mind over body" (Temple, *Bampton Lectures*, 1884, p. 200). Such may have succeeded for a time in cases of functional nervous diseases and imaginary complaints, but when faith in them was lost, the pretence was detected.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

any rate probable that many cases of persistent eczema, and some of psoriasis, lupus and syphilis, were included under this name (λέπρα). Now there is not one of these diseases which admits of instantaneous cure by means of a strong mental impression."¹

Would Mr. Thompson attempt to deal in the manner he suggests with the cases of leprosy in the East? Would he reduce all such to cases of skin disease? We must remember, however, that he is but the spokesman of a class of critics who have done all that in them lay to reduce to cures of nervous disorders the miraculous works of Christ. Their confutation comes with more grace and power not from us who are, like themselves, absolutely ignorant of these matters, but from medical men like Dr. R. J. Ryle, Sir Risdon Bennett, and A. Macalister, M.D., F.R.S.,² who have made a special study of the diseases in question. Mr. Thompson's own style of diagnosis may be judged from his describing, without any proof or argument, the case of the *withered hand* as one of "hysterical paralysis or functional paraplegia."³ Dr. Ryle's careful examination of the case concludes with the remark, "If such was the pathology of the case described in Mark iii. 1, it is needless to say that although it belongs to the group of the nervous diseases, it does not belong to that class of nervous disease which admits of treatment by moral impression or emotional shock." At any rate, "common-sense," to which Mr. Thompson appeals, refuses to believe that a limb reduced to a mere stick, through atrophy of

¹ *Hibbert Journal* (April, 1907), *The Neurotic Theory of the Miracles of Healing*.

² See Hastings's *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. III., Medicine.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

muscle and bone, could be cured in this way by suggestion or emotion. "Credat Judæus Apella."

In conclusion, we affirm that there is no evidence whatever forthcoming to show that our Lord employed mental healing in His cures, or that the diseases He dealt with were amenable to such treatment.¹ He cured men with the Divine virtue or power (*δύναμις*) that went forth from Himself,² to heal and restore humanity in body and soul. Are we to accept against our Lord's own explanation the statement of those who have no special claim to be heard on the matter, and who have offered no evidence and put forward no argument to support their contentions?

III.—WORKS IN THE SPIRIT-WORLD

In the third place, we have to consider the miracles of deliverance which our Lord wrought upon those possessed by evil spirits. The phenomenon of "possession" is represented in the Gospels as a terrible reality. A strange spiritual power entering into and possessing a man's soul and body, cannot be explained away. It is unreasonable not to believe in a devil, a malignant evil spirit, who is the cause of hostility to Christ, and who organizes his kingdom against the kingdom of God. It is "the mystery of iniquity" that helps us to understand the perplexing history of the human race; the conflicts and controversies of the Christian Church; the bewildering facts of our own personality, its wayward moods and seemingly irrepressible desires. Holy Scripture reveals the sad fact very gradually, but very surely, that human life has been blighted to a certain extent by the inroads of a hostile presence. Of that presence we find a hint here and there in

¹ See *The Miracles of Jesus*, p. 81 (E. O. Davies).

² Mark v. 30; Luke viii. 46.

Scripture.¹ In *Job*, *Zachariah*, and *Chronicles* we read of Satan the enemy of men, who tempts them to fall from righteousness and God. But that power is only revealed in all its malignity and hostility, most providentially for humanity, after the power that can overcome it has been introduced into the world, and made manifest in the Incarnate Lord.

The most awe-inspiring of the works of Christ were wrought in connection with that hostile presence, for they reveal a terrible state of affairs in the kingdom of humanity. The strong man armed is in possession of his goods, his chattels, his slaves. But the stronger than he cometh and proceedeth to bind him, and then sets free his captives. Mankind was in actual communion with an evil spirit of despair and bitterness that filled them with all kinds of misery, hatred, malice, unrest, strife and evil temper through the power of the Devil. The utter misery, moral corruption, base depravity, reckless wickedness, cruel licentiousness, prodigal waste, and spiritual despair of the Roman Empire are proverbial in the history of the race. The Empire may fascinate us by its magnificence, its opulence, its vastness and its organization, but it had been built up by a cast-iron system of cruelty, crime and inhumanity. A dull and long-drawn-out cry of despair went up from the heart of the Empire for deliverance from the bonds of misery and sin, and for the dawning of a new hope to save a falling world. Its religions, its philosophies, its pleasures, its mysteries, its culture and its cults, proved insufficient to give hope or strength or courage to resist the powers that were breaking up human life

¹ Job i. 6-12. This temptation scene throws a forward light upon the temptation of our Lord. In Zech. iii. 1-2 Satan opposes Joshua the high priest, and in *Chronicles* xxi. Satan tempts David to number Israel.

from within, and the forces that were combining to overwhelm the Empire from without. Satan is exhibiting the strength and glory of his organization when humanity appears too weak and enfeebled to resist. Most providentially and appropriately at the psychological moment the God of hope reveals Himself in the life of the Son of His goodwill and peace, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Who can subdue the Evil One.

Generally speaking, if our eyes were opened, and we could see the evil spirits contending with the good for the possession of the souls of men, we could realize more fully the importance of the issues of the awful conflict, and the necessity of vigilant prayer as a means of keeping ourselves in fellowship with the Redeemer and the Spirit. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* there is a vivid description of the manner in which men are tempted. Christian was so alarmed by the feeling that he was accompanied by evil spirits that he hardly recognized his own voice when he prayed, and finally when a wicked spirit came up close behind him, and began to whisper blasphemous things into his ear, he imagined they proceeded out of his own mind. This terrible picture serves to illustrate the way in which the Evil Spirit generally worms himself into a man's life and soul.

Possession was, however, in many senses a special mark of the period of the new birth of the world. Satan was allowed to put forth all his powers, and make a supreme effort to retain man in his possession when he knew that his kingdom was to be taken from him. Bishop Westcott suggested very reasonably that there might be an intimate relation between the inner life of a people and their physical state, and that "the prevailing thoughts and tempers of men" might be reflected in "types of disease

prevalent among them.”¹ The mental and physical distress of the period, which has been described above, may have had its complement or counterpart in this form of spiritual distress known as “possession.” This trouble manifested itself in various ways, in blindness, dumbness, epilepsy, madness and melancholy.² Some of these represent organic obstructions, and others cases of intermittent and habitual frenzy. Some people would explain all these disorders as different forms of nervous disease. Neurasthenia, or nervous debility, does induce melancholy and madness, But, as Bishop Westcott says, “we are far from discovering the cause of the malady when we have determined its seat.”

However, as it is only fair to let every man have his say, we shall call first upon our opponent, Mr. J. M. Thompson. He says: “The belief in ‘possession’ and the practice of exorcism are phenomena common to many races and many religions. Among uneducated people, before the growth of psychology or medical science, madness, epilepsy, and the more violent or intractable forms of certain diseases are commonly believed to be the work of an alien spirit inhabiting the body of the patient. The case is treated by a primitive kind of psycho-therapeutics which relies chiefly on the power of certain formulæ or incantations.”³ He states, as is well known, that there were professional exorcists at Ephesus,⁴

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 53 (New edition, 1913).

² Matt. ix. 32-34, a dumb man possessed with a demon (κωφὸν δαιμονιζόμενον); Matt. xii. 22, blind and dumb (δαιμονιζόμενος); Matt. xvii. 15, lunatic and sore vexed (σεληνιαζεται καὶ κακῶς πᾶσχει); Mark v. 2, the madman with an unclean spirit; Matt. xi. 18, of the Baptist, who came neither eating nor drinking, they said “he hath a demon.”

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴ Acts. xix.

one of the great centres of magical art, with special magical formulæ, Ephesian letters, of its own.¹ He refers to Tylor's *Primitive Culture*² for "a great body of evidence for the savage theory of demoniacal possession and obsession, which has been for ages, and still remains, the dominant theory of disease and inspiration among the lower races." He alludes to the special instance of exorcism mentioned by Josephus in *Antt.* viii. 2, 5. It was performed by one Eleazer in the presence of Vespasian, and the performer pretended to draw out the demon through the nose of the patient, using an incantation composed by Solomon. He concludes with an extraordinary story recorded in the *Journal*³ of John Wesley of the exorcism of an evil spirit from a woman, and in which the writer says, "All her pangs ceased in a moment. She was filled with peace and knew that the son of wickedness was departed from her," which seems to tell against his own case.

According to his view, the theory of "possession" was an erroneous belief, and was merely a device used in an ignorant age to account for strange phenomena in mental and nervous disorders. To one who adopts this theory the lunatic boy who frequently fell into the fire and the water⁴ had all the symptoms of epilepsy; the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum⁵ was suffering from some form of hysteria; and the deaf and dumb from hysterical neurosis.⁶ Those who put forward this theory hold that such complaints were capable of psycho-therapeutic treatment, or mental healing. But psycho-therapy can only be applied to purely psychic, and not to organic disorders, and the chief

¹ Ramsay, *Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible*, I., 732.

² II., 114f.

³ *Everyman's Library*, I., 236.

⁴ Matt. xvii. 15.

⁵ Luke iv. 31-37.

⁶ See McComb, *Religion and Medicine*, p. 360.

instrument in this kind of healing is "suggestion."¹ Now, Dr. R. J. Ryle as a medical man says: "The persons who may be fairly supposed to have constituted the bulk of the 'possessed' are not, as a matter of fact, the sort of persons to be straightway healed by a word. Doubtless personal and emotional influences are important factors in the treatment of these unfortunate beings, especially when these influences are brought to bear in a systematic manner and over a prolonged period in institutions wholly given to the work, but these are not the subjects among whom to look for examples of faith healing; and it may be added, they are the subjects who lend themselves least of all to the modern remedial measures of hypnotism and suggestion."²

Now, St. Luke is always careful to use the correct medical terms,³ and he refers to the case of the

¹ I. H. Coriat, M.D., *Religion and Medicine*, p. 68.

² *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1907, pp. 576-583.

³ See Hobart's *The Medical Language of St. Luke*. e.g., he uses *ρίπτειν* in iv. 35, the medical word for convulsions and fits; in iv. 38, he distinguishes the two kinds of fever *μέγας* and *μικρός* (see Galen). The term "full (*πλήρης*) of leprosy" in v. 12 is significant. In Luke vii. 10, *ὑγιαίνειν* is the correct medical word for "to be in sound health." *παραλελυμένος* in v. 18 is more than "palsied." "It is the correct technical Greek term for pronounced paralysis from disease of some part of the nervous system" (Sir Risdon Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 93). In vii. 21 he distinguishes *νόσοι* and *μάστιγες* as "chronic" and "acute" forms of disease respectively. See Aretaeus (Hobart, *op. cit.*, p. 12). Regarding viii. 43, Hobart says the phrase *ῥύσις αἵματος* is quite medical; and that *ιστάναι*, only here in the New Testament in this sense, is the regular medical term for stoppage of body discharges. In x. 10 we have *θεραπεία* the usual word for medical treatment. In xiii. 10-17, the case of the infirm woman—only in Luke—is described in medical language, *ἀπολέλυσαι* denoting the relaxation of the contracted muscles of the chest, and *ἀνωρθώθη* the strengthening of the spinal cord and muscles.

blind and dumb man,¹ the epileptic boy,² the unclean spirit,³ and the casting out of the legion.⁴ He would hardly have described these as cases of "possession" unless there was something peculiarly striking about them. He would surely have been able to diagnose cases of hysteria, nervous debility, and disorder, without being compelled to have recourse to "the device of an unscientific age to account for the *appearance* of an oppressed will or personality exhibited in mental disease, and epileptic attacks in a marked degree, and in a less obtrusive manner in other ailments."⁵ And in Luke xiii. 32, our Lord is represented as distinguishing between ordinary cures and the expulsion of demons (ἐκβάλλω δαιμόνια καὶ ἰάσεις ἀποτελῶ). Cf. Mark i. 32: "They brought unto Him all that were diseased (κακῶς ἔχοντας) and them that were possessed with devils" (δαιμονιζομένους). Sir Risdon Bennett in *The Diseases of the Bible*⁶ says: "Nor does it appear to us possible, on any principle of medical science, to refer these [*i.e.*, such cases of "possession" as have been mentioned] to any known form of bodily disease." The fact is, that the seat of the disorder may be in the mental or the nervous system. But the seat of the disease cannot be identified with its

And yet it is Luke who, in xi. 14, speaks of a demon who was dumb, and who alone records the words of Jesus referring to the daughter of Abraham "*whom Satan bound*," xiii. 16.

¹ Luke xi. ² Luke ix. ³ Luke iv. ⁴ Luke viii.

⁵ Bruce, *Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 179, who quotes Weizsäcker (*Untersuchungen*, p. 375). "The unity of the diseases (associated with demoniacal possession) is only that of a general popular idea which embraced in it all that gave the impression of an oppressed personality, therefore not only insanity and mental diseases in general, but also nervous disorders."

⁶ ii. 82.

cause. It is the cause¹ that we are in quest of. And if there is good foundation for the belief in the existence and influence of evil spirits over the bodies of men, and if our Lord accepted this theory,² we must accept it too. For here there is no place for "accommodation."

Bishop Westcott observed, "The same outward affections are referred by the Evangelist to different causes; and though it is wholly uncertain by what common characteristics the cases of possession were distinguished, it is enough for us to know that they cannot be identified with any one natural form of disease from the variety of their external results, while on the other hand, when men saw the sufferer, they pronounced at once on the *source* of his affliction."³ The symptoms may have appeared like those of epilepsy, melancholy, dumbness, etc., and yet have been caused by a totally different disorder. They are not the only class of ancient plagues that moderns have failed to diagnose.

The evil or unclean spirits are said to have recognized the Christ at once as "the Holy One of God,"⁴ the very confession of St. Peter in John vi. 69. They dreaded His coming to destroy or remove them. This fact throws light upon the mystery. For the emancipation of man from such a possession was

¹ Keim in *Jesu von Nazara* puts forward the theory that belief in demoniac possession was a mere hallucination, and that various ailments were effects of this delusion. Imaginary ailments are very real ones to the sufferers. But here there was something that a diseased imagination cannot explain.

² See Romanes (*Thoughts on Religion*, p. 180): "The emphasis which Jesus Christ lays on diabolic agency is so great that, if it is not a reality, He must be regarded either as seriously misled about realities which concern the spiritual life or else as seriously misleading others."

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 51 (Ed. 1913). ⁴ Luke iv. 34; Mark i. 24.

the result of the entering of a new Power into the world, Who by His Personal Influence and without any magic formulæ delivered man from their power. These miracles on the spirit-world were miracles of judgment ¹ as well as miracles of deliverance.

It is, however, a mistake to think that "possession" is a thing of the past. The Psychological Research Society has investigated many strange and weird phenomena connected with the human personality. Many of these can be explained by hypnotism and by telepathy. But a residuum remains, such as "automatic writing," which can only be explained by "possession." For the time being, the organs of the entranced medium are under the "control" of some strange intelligence, and the medium delivers messages incomprehensible to himself and in a language he does not understand. To surrender oneself to such a control one must denude oneself of all thought, feeling, and personality, and remain absolutely passive and impersonal. In a word, it is the case of the mind empty, swept and garnished, into which demons entered more and worse than before. There are many, however, who do not look upon the matter in this light. They profess to regard

¹ Some of these miracles were miracles of *intercession*, such as the Syrophoenician's daughter (Matt. xv., Mark vii.), the lunatic boy (Matt. xvii., Mark ix., Luke ix.), the dumb man (Matt. ix.), the blind and dumb man (Matt. xii). Others were miracles of *opposition*, e.g., the unclean spirit of Mark i. and Luke iv., the "legion" of Matt. viii., Mark v., Luke viii. Some of the first, e.g., the deliverance of the dumb man of Matt. ix., and of the blind and dumb man of Matt. xii., led to opposition (of the Pharisees); and some of the miracles of opposition led to miracles of intercession, e.g., after the expulsion of the unclean spirit of Mark i. 23 "they brought unto Him all that were diseased and that were possessed with devils" (Mark i. 32), and the possessed man of Gadara became His first missionary to Decapolis (Mark v. 20).

these communications as coming from the departed.¹ But of course this is beyond their powers to establish. Some of them, like the late F. W. Meyers, are convinced that "between the spiritual and material world an avenue of communication does exist."² But they seek to close the door they have opened for "possession" by denying that there is any "evidence either for angelical, for diabolical, or for hostile possession. . . . A devil is not a creature whose existence is independently known to science; and the accounts of the invading devils seem due to mere self-suggestion. . . . Especially in the Middle Ages—amid powerful self-suggestions of evil and terror—did these quasi-posessions reach an intensity and violence which the calm and sceptical atmosphere of the modern hospital checks and discredits."³ On the other hand, there are others who, after a lengthened and devoted study of psychical phenomena, have come to the conclusion that many of them are due to the agency of devils.⁴ Professor Müller, once a leader of spiritualists in Germany, returned to Christianity, and declared that spiritualism was a bold scheme of Satan for the destruction of the Church of Christ. The practice of trying to set up

¹ Prof. Barrett: "For our own part we believe there is some active intelligence behind, and apart from, the automatist, an intelligence which is more like the deceased person it professes to be than that of any other we can imagine."—*Psychical Research*, p. 245.

² See *Psychic Phenomena*, H. Frank. Cf. "I have no hesitation in affirming with the utmost confidence that the 'spirit' hypothesis is justified by its fruits"—Dr. Hodgson, *Survival of Man*, p. 153.

³ Meyers' *Human Personality*, II., 198, 199.

⁴ One of these inquirers, an honest, fearless and most intelligent man, who had devoted himself to the subject for years, told me that such was his conclusion of the whole matter. I am not at liberty at present to divulge his name.

spiritual communication with the living or the dead leads not only to the loss of spiritual life, but also to the loss of our personality, our true self, must foster a morbid imagination, and finally must end in insanity, in a state when hallucination will be so blended with reality that life will be a confused dream. An habitually passive state of mind must be cultivated by anyone who desires to become a "medium," and such is exposed to all sorts of evil suggestions and thoughts. Let no one be tempted to tamper with hypnotic influence or psychic powers, or the science which illustrates the fact that Satanic influences are ever present in our midst, seeking in every possible way to enter into our hearts and make havoc of our lives. To dabble with spiritualism in any form is to play with edged tools. It is hard to get rid of an unholy influence once it has been allowed to find an entrance. And in the end the medium becomes totally subject to the "control" of the "intelligence," and like Christian in the Valley cannot distinguish his own thoughts from the suggestions of the "control."

We have been dealing with special forms of "possession"; but Satan is not limited to these. There are manifold ways in which he gets possession of men's souls, even if he does not become master of their bodies in the above sense. Against his evil power we have the power of the Holy One of God, the Holy Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is that power that can keep out the evil suggestions and imaginations that come from the devil, thoughts unclean, impure, blasphemous, malicious, uncharitable, demoralizing and ignoble. It is that Divine power that can fill us with aspirations holy and pure, thoughts kind and sweet, ideas noble and grand, ideals lofty and Christ-like, feelings generous and loving, yearnings Divine and God-like.

"Like tides on a crescent sea-beach when the moon is
new and thin,
Unto our hearts high yearnings come swelling and
surging in,
Come from the mystic ocean, whose rim no foot has
trod ;
Some call it aspiration—and others call it God."

Jewish Demonology was an elaborate system. See the Talmud, where the demons and their ways are described at length (*Berachoth*, 51a ; *Pesachim*, 112b). Their power is said to be strongest up to cock-crow, and then to cease. God alone has power over them. Josephus described the demons as the departed spirits of bad men (B.J. VII., VI., 3). In the *Book of Enoch* they are represented as lost angels who had power to assail men's bodies, and to cause convulsions, and to tempt and oppress men until the judgment. The modern Arab believes in the Jinn or evil spirit. See Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*. *Mejnun* means a man possessed by a Jinn. The Khasi of Assam ascribe their ailments to the work of immanent demons. Our Lord's exorcism of spirits implied, however, something more than the removal of diseases, as we have seen.

Missionaries in the East constantly testify to the reality of possession and to the value of exorcism. In the *Life of Pastor Hsi* (Shee, a native Chinaman), by Mrs. Howard Taylor, we read how Mrs. Hsi became strangely affected. "Especially when the time came for daily worship she was thrown into paroxysms of ungovernable rage. Sometimes she would rush into the room like one insane, and violently break up the proceedings, or would fall insensible on the floor, writhing in convulsions that resembled epilepsy" (p. 15). Eventually Pastor Hsi "called for a fast for three days and nights in his household, and gave himself to prayer. Weak in body but strong in faith, he laid hold on the promises of God, and claimed complete deliverance. Then without hesitation he went to his distressed wife, and laying his hands upon her, in the name of Jesus, commanded the evil spirits to depart and torment her no more. Then and there the change was wrought. To the astonishment of all except her husband, Mrs. Hsi was immediately delivered. . . . She forthwith declared herself a Christian. The effect upon the villages was startling. Familiar as they were with cases of alleged demon-possession more or less terrible in character, the

people had never seen or heard of a cure, and never expected to. What could one do against malicious spirits? It seemed little less than a miracle" (p. 16). Pastor Hsi, at his conversion, had taken the name of "Devil Overcomer," which was prophetic of the attitude of his life as a Christian teacher. "To him Satan was ever a personal foe, a watchful mighty antagonist, keen to press the least advantage, always designing fresh onslaughts, without or within" (p. 10). On p. 97 the sad case of a possessed girl is described. In Pastor Hsi's presence she became subdued, but when he had gone away she had a relapse. In the midst of most terrible convulsions, foul language and blasphemies streamed from her lips. "He is gone; he is gone!" she cried. "Now I fear no one. Let them bring their Jesus. I defy them all. They will never drive us out again." Shortly afterwards she died.

In *The Light of the Morning*, by Miss Mary E. Darley (C.E.Z.M.S.), there is a graphic account of a man who had fallen in a sort of fit before her. "The man," she writes (p. 81), "had been paid a large sum of money to become devil-possessed, and this he had accomplished by means of days of fasting, and by praying that the spirit of some special idol might enter his body and unravel to him all the mysteries of the future. People willing to be hired for this purpose are to be found in almost every village. They literally sell themselves to the powers of darkness, and in time become permanently possessed. Even in the early stages they can easily be recognized by a restlessness of expression, a working of the hands, and a fierceness of resentment when the name of the Lord is mentioned." The man who fell in a fit before her had been engaged in answering one who inquired of him whether a sick relation would recover or not. Demon-possession is a terrible reality in places where Satan rules. "Deliver us from the Evil One" is a very real prayer in such places.

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